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Flamingos of the Soda Lake

ROBERT S. CLARK:

Berlioz and His Trojans

VERNON YOUNG:

Fool, Thou Poet

Poems by DANIEL HOFFMAN, JOHN HOLLANDER,
NANCY CARDOZO, JOHN TAGLIABUE, COLETTE INEZ,
DAVID BROMIGE, GRACE SCHULMAN, PHILIP BOOTH.

Reviews by ROGER SALE, RONALD DE FEO,
JOHN SIMON, B. H. FUSSELL, J. E. CHAMBERLIN,
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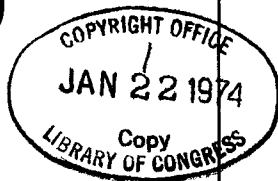
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THE Hudson Review

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Dear Sir,

In view of Marius Bewley's long and happy association with THE HUDSON REVIEW, we believe your readers will be glad to learn that a committee has been formed to honor his memory in a way appropriate to his spirit and his interests. We would like to establish a fund of some \$20,000 in his name and use the income for two occasions each year: a reading of poetry one semester and a public lecture the other, on the Rutgers campus at New Brunswick where Marius was a beloved and distinguished teacher.

Contributions should be made payable to the "Marius Bewley Fund—Rutgers University" and sent to:

Professor Richard Poirier
Department of English
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Rutgers University
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Marius Bewley Fund Committee
RICHARD POIRIER,
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New Brunswick, N. J.

Dear Sir,

I am editing an anthology of Asian literature (China, Japan, Korea, Vietnam and India) and would be happy to consider contributions from *HR* readers. Because of the publisher's deadline, I cannot consider materials received after May 1, 1974, and would prefer to see them much earlier than that. I am seeking translations having "literary merit." Contributors should include a stamped and self-addressed envelope. Address: 172 Shipherd Circle, Oberlin, Ohio 44074.

WILLIAM MCNAUGHTON/Editor

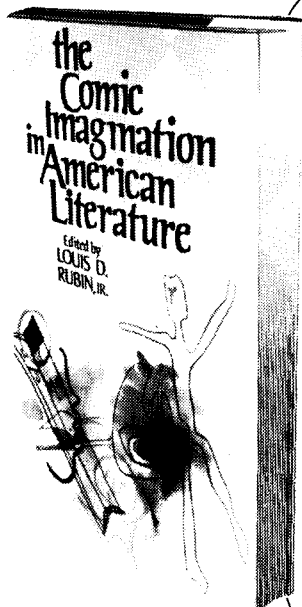
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Notes on Contributors

JOYCE CAROL OATES writes that it took her fifteen years to complete this Kafka essay, and that it will be included in a book of essays on Plath, Lawrence, Mailer, Dickey, and others, *New Heaven, New Earth: The Visionary Experience in Literature* to be published late in 1974.

DAVID BROMIGE* is Assistant Professor of English at California State College, Sonoma, where he runs the poetry reading series and edits a tri-quarterly magazine, *Open Reading*. Mr. Bromige has published both prose and poetry in various literary magazines. A new book of poems, *Tight Corners & What's Around Them*, is scheduled for publication by Black Sparrow in 1974.

LAURENCE LIEBERMAN's latest volume of poetry, *The Osprey Suicides*, (Macmillan) is reviewed by Vernon Young in this issue.

NANCY CARDOZO* lives and works in an old stone house in New Milford, Connecticut with her husband, the painter, Russell Cowles, and their two sons. Her poetry and short stories have appeared in many magazines, newspapers, and anthologies. A book of her selected poems, *Helmet of the Wind*, was published in 1972 by Bobbs-Merrill.

ROBERT S. CLARK is a freelance editor and writer, a contributing editor and columnist for *Stereo Review*, and the author of many articles on music for that magazine.

DANIEL HOFFMAN is Consultant in Poetry of the Library of Congress. The poems in this issue will appear in his next book, *The Center of Attention*, to be published by Vintage in March, 1974.

JOHN HOLLANDER's latest book, *Town & Country Matters*, is published by Godine.

JOHN TAGLIABUE* has published four books of poems, the most recent is *The Doorless Door* (Grossman). Mr. Tagliabue teaches Comparative Literature at Bates College.

PHILIP BOOTH's most recent collection of poetry was *Margins* (Viking).

GRACE SCHULMAN* is poetry editor of *The Nation* and Assistant Professor of English at Baruch College.

COLETTE INEZ's* work has appeared in numerous anthologies and periodicals. Her first collection of poems, *The Woman Who Loved Worms*, was published by Doubleday.

ROGER SALE's most recent book of criticism is *Modern Heroism*, essays on D. H. Lawrence, William Empson, and J. R. R. Tolkien (University of California).

BRUCE ALLEN* is a freelance writer and critic who formerly taught in the Department of English at the University of New Hampshire. Mr. Allen lives in Kittery, Maine.

HAYDEN CARRUTH has recently received the 1973 Governor's Award for Excellence in the Arts from Vermont's Governor Thomas P. Salmon.

B. H. FUSSELL has taught English at both Connecticut and Douglass Colleges and is completing graduate work at Rutgers University.

RONALD DE FEO* has had short stories in *The Transatlantic Review* and *The Massachusetts Review*. He has published criticism in other magazines and is currently working on a novel.

J. E. CHAMBERLIN is Assistant Professor in the Department of English at the University of Toronto.

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JOYCE CAROL OATES

Kafka's Paradise

There is no need for you to leave the house. Stay at your table and listen. Don't even listen, just wait. Don't even wait, be completely quiet and alone. The world will offer itself to you to be unmasked; it can't be otherwise; in raptures it will writhe before you.

. . . not only [might we] remain in Paradise permanently, but . . . [we may] in fact be there permanently, no matter whether we know it here or not.

—Kafka, from *Reflections on Sin, Suffering, Hope, and the True Way*.¹

KAFKA IS NOT ONLY ONE OF THE FINEST writers of this century, now legendary and saintly, and bearing, as Auden remarked in 1941, the same sort of relation to the age that Dante, Shakespeare, and Goethe bore to theirs, but he has become for many of his readers a kind of perpetual riddle, a Zen koan—the ultimate, interior, soul-transforming experience, which to “solve” would be to “solve” the problem of existence itself. How to interpret Kafka, how to transcend the position of a typical Kafka hero, and to realize the secrets of the Castle itself!—it seems an incredible task, and yet Kafka seems almost to be addressing us in this enigmatic exchange:

. . . a man once said: Why such reluctance? If you only followed the parables you yourself would become parables and with that rid of all your daily cares.

Another said: I bet that is also a parable.

The first said: You have won.

The second said: But unfortunately only in parable.

The first said: No, in reality: in parable you have lost.²

Can Kafka mean this, and the despairing problems of life are finally tricks of language, the ceaseless self-torment of hell merely that—a self-torment that willfully constructs parables? Unlike Beckett, whose poetic despair may grow out of a conviction that beyond poetry there is nothing, beyond the human invention of language there *is* nothing at all, not even humanity, Kafka

¹ Franz Kafka, *Dearest Father and Other Writings*, translated by Ernst Kaiser and Eithne Wilkins (New York: Schocken Books, 1954), p. 48, p. 41.

² *Parables and Paradoxes* (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 11.

asserts boldly that in "reality" we always win. Our victories are assured. Only in parable, or in the self-conscious speculations of the mind can failure be a possibility: the word *failure* is a word that must be believed in, before the condition of failure can become real. The more Kafka's heroes strive for victory, the more violently their intellects demand explanations, the more inevitable their doom. All of these men are given hints of this truth, but they are so infatuated with their eloquence that they become helplessly trapped in their own casuistry or in the depths of their own egos; and it appears that they have lost. But only in parable, as Kafka says. In reality—in nature—they have won.

It appears that there is no solution, no way out, but it is this conception of life-as-paradox that cripples the human spirit. To break through the paradox is to transcend the self; as in Zen Buddhism, the realization of the koan or riddle must be experienced as an event, and not as a puzzle—by a sudden obliteration of the ego, a realization of the identity of the finite self with the infinite, a vision of Paradise that is at the same time the "profane" world. Kafka's visionary art is certainly religious, though not in any conventional Western sense, for so terrifying is his investigation of Paradise/Hell that usually perceptive critics like Eliseo Vivas,³ distinguishing between Kierkegaard and Kafka, mistake Kafka's dramatization of anguish for his ultimate vision, when it is, in fact, the record of the ego's crisis as it approaches its own transcendence—the necessary anguish that precedes that "radiance" mentioned so often in his work. So long as the reader identifies with Kafka's anti-heroes, investing emotional and intellectual energy in the heroic but doomed struggle of the self to retain its selfness, Kafka is one of the darkest of writers. But there is another, higher Kafka, the creator of Joseph K. of *The Trial* and K. of *The Castle*, the visionary who cannot be contained within any single identity in his work. While Joseph K. and K. struggle to achieve an impossible goal—the self-defined autonomy of the self—Kafka directs us toward the realization that their struggles are pointless, for the salvation they crave is already in their possession "no matter whether [they] know it here or not."

Life is a paradox only when it is defined as such. In the brief "An Imperial Message," Kafka speaks directly of the possibility

³ In "Kafka's Distorted Mask," from *Creation and Discovery* (New York: 1948).

of experiencing enlightenment through an interior vision (a dream), when the external world of history and of other men fails us. "An Imperial Message" is central to Kafka's work, and since it suggests his interest in Oriental philosophy and psychology as well, it is helpful to summarize it:

The Emperor . . . has sent a message to you, the humble subject, the insignificant shadow cowering in the remotest distance before the imperial sun. . . . The messenger immediately sets out on his journey; a powerful, an indefatigable man; now pushing with his right arm, now with his left, he cleaves a way for himself through the throng. . . . But the multitudes are so vast; their numbers have no end. If he could reach the open fields how fast he would fly, and soon doubtless you would hear the welcome hammering of his fists on your door. But instead how vainly does he wear out his strength . . . if at last he should burst through the outermost gate—but never, never can that happen—the imperial capital would lie before him, the center of the world, crammed to bursting with its own refuse. Nobody could fight his way through here, least of all one with a message from a dead man.—But you sit at your window when evening falls and dream it to yourself.

The relationship between Emperor, messenger, and "humble subject," is one which fascinated Kafka, and which lies at the core of most of his works. Does the Emperor exist?—is he always dead?—who is the messenger, and what vast distances must he cross, how many thousands of years must he endure, simply to bring to the subject a "message from a dead man"? He wears out his earthly strength in vain, and if he is a projection of the subject's willful mind he is doomed to failure; like the Door-keeper in the parable "Before the Law" (from *The Trial*) and like the despairing, suicidal officer of "In the Penal Colony," he is more deluded than the subject himself, who waits passively for enlightenment. This would be tragic, but Kafka does not really believe in tragedy. Dissimilar though they may be on the surface, he shares with D. H. Lawrence a fundamental detestation of the conscious, private, grasping self, and a belief that tragedy is an art-form which expresses this over-estimation of the self, to the exclusion of other realms of being. Therefore, the attempt to achieve victory of any kind—even victory over one's own impulses—even victory over the flow of time—is the tragic revision of Paradise into Hell, a misreading of the "parable" for the "reality." The complicated questions with which the narrator of "Jose-

phine the Singer, or the Mouse Folk" concludes his reminiscence ("Was her actual piping notably louder and more alive than the memory of it will be? Was it even in her lifetime more than a simple memory? Was it not rather because Josephine's singing was already past losing in this way that our people in their wisdom prized it so highly . . .?") is in obvious, ironic contrast to the beauty and simplicity of Josephine's mysterious singing, which is wordless. The ordinary mouse folk, who are redeemed by this music without understanding it, are devoted to her though they are "people who love slyness beyond everything, without any malice . . . and childish whispering and chatter, innocent, superficial chatter . . . people of a kind [who] cannot go in for unconditional devotion," and it is such ordinary childish people who continually fashion a parable out of reality, and imagine this parable as a necessary means by which the hellish, fallen world can be understood, as if it were not Paradise all along. Gregor Samsa of "The Metamorphosis," lured out of the stale confines of his room, and out of his past life, by the beauty of his sister's violin-playing, feels "as if the way were opening before him to the unknown nourishment he craved." He too seeks redemption through an art beyond words.

But Gregor Samsa is also a form of the Hero, the questing self; ironically, he is a version of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*, the tightrope between man and the abyss of an over-intellectualized world. In Kafka's mythology, however, the Hero must die, must be swept out with the trash, in order that a transcendence may take place that is somehow exterior to him—in nature itself, perhaps, represented by his sister's increasing vivacity, "in spite of all the sorrow of recent times. . . ." Gregor's parents and his sister take a journey into the countryside, after Gregor's death; in the warm sunshine, new dreams arise, a totally new assessment of the family's fortunes is made, and the girl, stretching her young body, is that final, wordless affirmation of life that Gregor—or that aspect of Kafka—could not make: the "metamorphosis" is complete. In tragedy this metamorphosis is similarly accomplished after the fifth act, after the tragic hero has been sacrificed, but tragedy does affirm the violently individualistic, idiosyncratic Hero, who is clearly a superior human being: Kafka does not. What is "heroic" in Kafka is the entire process, of which the realization of radiance is the highest achievement.

but it does not and cannot matter who, specifically, experiences it.

The grotesque comedy of Kafka's work may have influenced contemporary "black humorists," but it is based upon assumptions that are shared by very few of our contemporaries. Kafka's anti-heroes evolve, or degenerate, into the anonymous mechanical men of Beckett and Ionesco, who are sometimes even further reduced to parts of bodies; but the vast, incomprehensible, and essentially divine world of Being in which these anti-heroes perform their ludicrous battles against themselves has vanished. The heroic is a mode of action, not contemplation; if it is related to language, this language is one of strife, logic, analysis, ceaseless classifications and exhaustive, hubristic attempts to dissect reality and conquer it. Kafka goes against the entire Western concept of the Hero: the brave, isolated, not-to-be-daunted Self against all other Selves and, of course, against Nature, which exists merely to be conquered or at least classified and dissected. To be a Hero, one must assume that there is a struggle of some kind; if one aspires to the heroic, and there seems to be no struggle available, he must then create it for himself. It is ironic that, in our time, Kafka's most fervent admirers have been men who have demonstrated, through their critical analyses of Kafka, an amazing *identification* with Kafka's deluded heroes, and not with the vision that Kafka sets over and against these heroes!—as if the struggle is not clearly shown to be attributable to an attitude, a cultural or psychological expectation, which Nature knows nothing of; which Nature, being wordless, will simply annihilate. It is not tragic that the Hunger Artist, so spiteful and self-concerned, should waste away in a corner of his cage, unobserved, while a splendid young panther draws everyone's attention—and should he not draw our attention, as well?—for the Hunger Artist admits that his fasting is based upon a lie, and the panther, like Gregor's sister, possesses the "joy of life" that lies outside the ego's torturous dominion; in fact, it knows nothing of the ego's struggles to assert a special, proud destiny, because it "knows" nothing at all. Tragedy demands an emotional investment in the ego, in the particular fate of a Hamlet or an Oedipus, who dramatizes for us—and sometimes with embarrassing transparency—the pale cast of thought that will eventually be destroyed, because it has simply evolved too far in one

direction. The intellect, a technique of perception and an aid for survival, can evolve too far, can become confused by its own inventions (Kafka's background in law surely aided him in this realization—though Kafka's "law" stories are much simpler than their analogues in real life), and must perish, must die out, just as certain animals with extraordinarily developed characteristics of specialization (enormous antlers, enormous size) must give way to those more suited for adaptation to the environment. As Dostoyevsky's *Underground Man* says, contemptuously, the intellect knows only what it has been told; and, trapped in history, are we not trapped by the limited development of science, by the limited accumulation of facts, if we place our absolute faith in the intellect? For the intellectual quests of Kafka's heroes are quests against nature, in fact "unnatural"—in the sense that nature knows nothing of hierarchies of being, only of survival in a harmonious field of relationships that can appear unharmonious or cruel only to a limited point of view. "The Metamorphosis" is not concerned solely with Gregor Samsa, but with a metamorphosis that includes and transcends him.

"The Hunter Gracchus" is an unusual work, for Kafka, in that one can perhaps discern the origin of the Hunter's guilt: the hunting of a chamois in the Black Forest, when his calling was evidently hunter of wolves. "I lay in ambush, shot, hit my mark, flayed the skins from my victims," he says. "Was there any sin in that?" He denies the possibility of his own sin, and can only blame the boatman for the fact that his death ship never ascends to a higher world. If one interprets the Hunter's sin as a sin against nature—the hunting of the chamois—the story makes a kind of sense; if one assumes that the Hunter Gracchus did only what his role demanded of him, fulfilled himself as a hunter whose attitude toward his "victims" is not meant to repel, it is more in line with the mysterious, visionary expressions Kafka has made of the guiltless guilt, the sinless sin, the "Guilt that is never to be doubted" of "In the Penal Colony." But the Hunter will not acknowledge any possibility of his sinfulness. Therefore he is "always in motion" and can never come to rest; his death ship approaches the other world, but

"I am forever . . . on the great stair that leads up to it. On that infinitely wide and spacious stair I clamber about, sometimes up, sometimes down, sometimes on the right, sometimes on the left, always in motion. . . . Do not laugh."

This terrible, ceaseless movement is the resistance of the individual to his fate, and reminds us movingly of Kafka's exhaustive introspective entries in his diaries and journals. Like the Hunter Gracchus, Kafka perhaps could not overcome the perpetual motion of his own intellect, which he saw as necessary before one might ascend to a higher existence. Refusing to accept his own sin or even the likelihood of his having sinned, the Hunter says, bravely, "I am here, more than that I do not know, further than that I cannot go. My ship has no rudder, and it is driven by the wind that blows in the undermost regions of death."

How does one finally make the ascent? How does one finally construct the perfect self-protecting burrow, the most eloquent and devastating of courtroom arguments, how does one outwit his senile father, make contact with the Castle though the Castle does not wish this contact, how does one absorb the threat of the leopards in the temple by "calculating" it into the ceremony?—how does one finally and ultimately, for all time, conquer all possible opponents, perhaps even humiliate them, crush them utterly? The hero is a man of action, and the perfect man of action—as William Carlos Williams said—is the suicide. All these struggles of the self to conquer itself are suicidal, a hopeless elbowing through the throng that surrounds the Emperor's palace. The message, the vision, the experience of enlightenment, comes only to the subject who remains at home at his window, when evening falls: it comes to him in a dream, it is given to him in a dream. He does not create the dream; he does not control it. It is given. It is a gift.

Enlightenment is possible in Kafka—indeed, it is not to be doubted. It is always available. But it is available only to the imagination that lets mind and body fall away. It cannot be delivered to the individual by messenger, or by the external apparatus of the Church (the ingenious torture-instrument of "In The Penal Colony"), not by any authority outside the individual. Kafka allows the Priest at the conclusion of *The Trial* a concern for Joseph K. that is more loving, more charitable, than anyone else's concern for him, but still this is not sufficient to save him, perhaps because Joseph K. does not have in himself a corresponding selflessness, a realization that his ego participates in a vast structure which it cannot conquer and should not want to conquer. Therefore, this aspect of man dies "like a

dog" and the shame of his death will "outlive him"—that is, it will pass into us, be inherited by us, if we cannot isolate Joseph K.'s sin.

The experience of enlightenment or grace, or the psychological equivalent of what Kierkegaard meant by the Leap of Faith, is always possible and, like guilt itself, is never to be doubted. Though Kafka was deeply interested in ancient Chinese philosophy, especially Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, few critical studies have related his work to Taoism; yet it is in Taoism that we come across the very spirit of Kafka himself, the awareness of a dominion of absolutely impersonal and incomprehensible Being over the efforts of individuals to influence it, or even to influence their own lives. Foreign to the West, because it is completely unscientific, committed to a metaphysics that scorns any expectations of causality, the Tao is experienced as parable, or paradox; but it transcends language entirely, just as it transcends any individual's grasp of it. Kafka obviously brought to Lao Tzu's writing a sensibility predisposed to this way of thinking, though he is characteristically modest in saying that he cannot quite understand it. According to Gustav Janouch in his *Conversations with Kafka*, Kafka owned nearly all the volumes of the German translations of Taoist writings. He spoke of having studied them "fairly deeply over a long period of time," though in Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* "I only discovered the hopeless shallowness of my own intellectual categories, which couldn't define or accommodate Lao Tsu's. . . ."⁴ To Janouch he read the following passage by a follower of Lao Tzu's, Chuang Tzu: "Death is not brought to life by life; Life is not killed by dying. Life and death are conditioned; they are contained within a great coherence." He spoke of this insight as fundamental to all religions and all wisdoms about life, and it is illuminating to see how the "great coherence" resolves—though without language—the predicaments of Kafka's various heroes.

⁴ Gustav Janouch, *Conversations With Kafka* (New York: New Directions), p. 153. In addition to the *Tao Te Ching*, Kafka had in his possession the following books: Kung-Futse's *Conversations*, Tschung Yung's *The Great Doctrine of Measure and Mean*; Lao Tse's *The Book of the Ancients Regarding Sense and Life*; Liä Tse's *The True Book of the Spring of the First Cause*; Chuang Tsi's *The True Book of the South Land of Blossom*. These works, he said, "are a sea in which one can easily drown." To my knowledge, Kafka never came across the *Bardo Thödol* (The Tibetan Book of the Dead)—fortunately for him, since it would have substantiated some of his most terrifying visions and provided a means by which his interest in Freudian thought might have been synthesized with his interest in Chinese philosophy.

Lao Tzu, according to tradition an older contemporary of Confucius, taught that "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao." The *Tao Te Ching* ("the book of the way") consists of eighty-one brief, enigmatic chapters, and represents a mysticism foreign even to Western mysticism because it is totally without emotion; it is so foreign to Western empirical thought that it is probably unreadable by men committed to rationalism and the "active principle." The teachings of Lao Tzu are always simple: "Yield and overcome." "He who stands on tiptoe is not steady. He who strides cannot maintain the pace." In Chapter 29, it is said that the universe cannot be improved: "If you try to change it, you will ruin it. If you try to hold it, you will lose it." Chapter 32:

Once the whole is divided, the parts need names.
 There are already enough names.
 One must know when to stop.
 Knowing when to stop averts trouble.
 Tao in the world is like a river flowing home to the sea.

Lao Tzu says in another verse that "the ten thousand things are born of being; Being is born of not being," and, in three lines remarkably similar to lines of Kafka's from *Reflections on Sin, Suffering, Hope and the True Way*,

Without going outside, you may know the whole world.
 Without looking through the window, you may see the ways
 of heaven.
 The farther you go, the less you know.⁵

Evidently Kafka did not read Buddhist writings, which would surely have intrigued him—the denial not only of a God, but of an existing self!—though he dramatizes with nightmarish detail the "Great Doubt" that overcomes the ego when it is about to be precipitated into enlightenment. This experience of soul-shattering doubt, of which Zen Buddhists write in detail, is the "sickness unto death" of Kierkegaard but, viewed with characteristic Eastern detachment, it is not emotional; it is psychological. It is only a mental experience, a phenomenon of the human mind, and therefore not very significant. Kafka, unlike Kier-

⁵ All these quotations from the *Tao Te Ching* are from the excellent new translation by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English (New York: Vintage, 1972).

kegaard, attempts to describe this experience not in terms of pre-existing religious language (in which it must necessarily be obscured or distorted) but as psychological, secular experience. Not for Kafka the fastidious puritanism of an Augustine, who divides the universe into realms of God and Man; Kafka declares that the City of Man is the City of God, just as Hell is Paradise and Paradise Hell. One of the paradoxes of Zen is the belief that one's "ordinary mind" is his "Buddha-mind," which Kafka would have understood perfectly. Just as Paradise is a continuous event, a continuous loss and a continuous gain, so in Oriental mysticism "the wisdom of Nirvana and the Ignorance of the Sangsāra illusorily appear to be two things . . . [but] cannot truly be differentiated."⁶

Basic to any understanding of Kafka's work is his sympathy with this kind of thinking; otherwise, his writing is hopelessly despairing, incomplete, self-pitying. Many of the entries in the Octavo Notebook for 1918 are illuminating in this regard, but that of February 5 is especially direct:

Destroying the world would be the task to set oneself only, first, if the world were evil, that is, contradictory to our meaning, and secondly, if we were capable of destroying it. The first seems so to us; of the second we are not capable. We cannot destroy this world, for we have not constructed it as something independent; what we have done is to stray into it. . . .

For us there exist two kinds of truth, as they are represented by the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life. The truth of the active principle and the truth of the static principle. In the first, Good separates itself off from Evil; the second is nothing but Good itself, knowing neither of Good nor of Evil. The first truth is given to us really, the second only intuitively. That is what it is so sad to see. The cheerful thing is that the first truth pertains to this fleeting moment, the second to eternity; and that, too, is why the first truth fades out in the light of the second.⁷

By "active" he meant "striving," by "static" he meant "without striving." The first truth is given "really"—that is, objectively or scientifically, so that others may verify it; the second is given "only intuitively"—that is, only from within. This is the same distinction that Pascal makes between the "*esprit de géométrie*"

⁶ From "The Yoga of Thatness" of Tibetan Buddhism, in *World of the Buddha*, edited by Lucien Stryk (New York: Doubleday, 1969), p. 315.

⁷ *Dearest Father*, p. 90-91.

and the "*esprit de finesse*"—though Pascal seemed to believe that it was possible to be neither mathematical nor intuitive, and he lived, of course, in a time in which one side of the psyche had not been overdeveloped. In Kafka's secular age, the unmiraculous age of the penal colony in which guilt is not acknowledged, let alone punished, and which therefore denies redemption for the sinner, the intuitive has been suppressed. (For this reason Kafka is a little skeptical of Pascal's sincerity; he says in one of his diary entries:

Pascal arranges everything very tidily before God makes his appearance, but there must be a deeper, uneasier skepticism than that of a man cutting himself to bits with—indeed—wonderful knives, but still, with the calm of a butcher. Whence this calm? this confidence with which the knife is wielded? Is God a theatrical triumphal chariot that (granted the toil and despair of the stagehands) is hauled on the stage from afar by ropes?⁸

Both Pascal and Kafka affirm, however, the superiority of the "*esprit de finesse*" over the "mathematical *esprit de géométrie*," the truth of eternity over the truth of time. In Kafka's analysis of this problem there is an awareness of the simultaneity of both truths, as if they were, perhaps, uses or techniques of the mind rather than permanent states of "personality." That is, the "two kinds of truth" of which Kafka speaks are fluctuating, always in motion, not poles of being so much as possibilities of existential experience. What Kafka calls the truth represented by the Tree of Knowledge is a pragmatic, calculating, operative mode of adapting the environment to oneself, in order to survive, initially, but gradually, in civilization, in order to conquer the environment: to press forward, like Faust, hoping for immortality. The "truth of the active principle" immediately dissociates what Kafka calls Good and Evil, though it could also be called Self and Object—for the Self always assumes that it is in possession of what is good (self-realization and self-aggrandizement) and that its environment, in so far as it resists this "Good," is Evil. That Kafka should assign these ethical terms to a problem that is really psychological or epistemological indicates the degree to which he was shaped by his Judaeo-Christian culture, which is characterized, like Western philosophy in general, by a need to

⁸ Diary entry for August 2, 1917. *Diaries, 1914-1923* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), p. 173.

divide the world into opposites. Yet Kafka goes on to say that the rational mind is, in itself, that which *separates good from evil*; in the beginning, then, good and evil are not separated, Self and Object are not separate entities but one process, one event, one experience—like the Tao itself, beyond language and never experienced by the part of the mind that has invented language.

In his "Homage to Kafka," which is the introduction to the 1954 edition of *The Castle*, Thomas Mann says that Kafka is not a mystic because he lacks the "hot and heavy atmosphere of transcendentalism" and the transformation of the "sensual" into the "super-sensual." In Kafka, there is no "voluptuous hell," no "bridal bed of the tomb," nor the rest of the "stock-in-trade of the genuine mystic." Mann characterizes him as a "religious humorist." It is understandable that Mann, who investigated the dangers of the irrational and what he saw as the mystical (the "folk" in *Doctor Faustus*), should draw back from any admiration of a vision that lies outside of civilization; but, at the same time, one can doubt whether all mysticism is characterized by these clichés, and whether transcendentalism—surely not Kantian transcendentalism?—is "hot and heavy" and "voluptuous." Even so, one can see in Kafka this voluptuous hell, in the perverse ecstasy of the Hunger Artist, in the "transfiguration" and "radiance" of the victim's sixth hour on the torture instrument of "In The Penal Colony," and in any number of other frightening, surrealistic transformations of the "sensual" into the "super-sensual." But Kafka's mysticism is primarily one which intuits unity (though it experiences—or seems to experience—only fragments); it makes a distinction between the unifying mind and the mind that reasons this very distinction between Self and Object. As Kafka says in the aphorism from the Octavo Notebook, the truth of the static (or timeless) principle is "nothing but Good itself, knowing neither of Good nor of Evil."

The anguish we read of in Kafka's diaries and journals evidently grew out of his conviction that he must come to terms with his mysticism in a rational manner; he seemed to believe, guiltily and miserably, that he should continually "explain" himself to others. There is no doubt but that he did experience guilt—overwhelming, sickening, paralyzing guilt—

but he seems to have felt it because he was cutting himself off from that "bliss of the commonplace" that so fascinated Thomas Mann as well. For, so long as we assign the terms Good and Evil to an experience that is psychological, and only psychological, we are forever trapped, like the Hunter Gracchus, between two worlds; we are always in motion. Kafka is forever drawing away from people who love him, especially women—and then he is drawn back to them, violently, helplessly—then, detaching himself from them, he suffers immeasurable guilt,⁹ as the letters written to Milena Jesenska make clear. However closely one studies Kafka, however intimately one seems to know him, it remains ambiguous: does the art grow out of the guilt, or the guilt out of the art?

It does not lessen Kafka's value as a visionary artist to note, as Max Brod and others have done, the amazing ways in which Kafka transmuted difficult emotional experiences into fiction (how Milena "becomes" Frieda, for instance¹⁰), and the process by which he imagined his father as an archetypal presence, absorbing the various floating anxieties of the era—as the Victorians did, as well, expressing the war between ways of life as symbolic contests between fathers and sons; which is hardly an expression of private father-son feuds, but the expression of an entire civilization's neurotic burden. Certain kinds of art are cathartic, exorcizing, magical; not always for the artist, but perhaps for his audience. Like dreams, artistic creations transmute private, undifferentiated emotions or impulses into actual images, which can be dealt with, but it is problematic whether these images are equivalent to their sources or whether, in some way, they constantly fall short, and do not attain for the artist the liberation of a rebirth. There is a passage in one of Kafka's letters to Milena in which he speaks of the two of them standing "side by side, watching this creature on the ground which is me; but I, as the spectator, am then non-existent"¹¹—a vision that grows out of his despair, however, since he is very sick at this time, nearing death.

⁹ "Sometimes I believe I understand the Fall of Man as no one else"—from a letter to Milena Jesenska. *Letters to Milena* (New York: Schocken Books, 1953), p. 167.

¹⁰ Max Brod, *Franz Kafka: A Biography* (New York: Schocken Books, 1960), pp. 219-222.

¹¹ *Letters to Milena*, p. 197.

and realizes that he and Milena can never live together. Only in isolated moments, only when he is operating as an artist, does Kafka seem to experience the liberation from his own emotions which so cripple him ordinarily. Yet he must have seen his art as an artistry of "hunger" that will lead inevitably to his death by starvation—emotional starvation. The falling-short of the artist's attempts to objectify his own unique, curious psychological experience does, in a way that would be quite disturbing to most artists if they understood it, make certain the fact that he will keep on writing and that he will, exhausted or penniless or love-sick, put into recognizably coherent forms certain primordial images or experiences which his era requires. But why does his era require *him* to give shape to these shapeless dreams?—why not someone else? A question not to be answered, and, indeed, uttered only at the risk of releasing a psychic disturbance or rather the awareness of one; for it is the rare artist, like Blake or Whitman, who acknowledges happily his total dependence as an artist (an impersonal instrument) upon a ground of Being that cannot be comprehended by him, to which his intellect has no access whatsoever, and for which, unceasingly, his personal life must be sacrificed if it threatens to use up too much of his energy. Unsettling as his remarks must be for the artist, and perhaps for most modern men, Jung is quite correct in stating so bluntly that every creative person is a synthesis of ostensibly contradictory aptitudes: on the one side he is a human being with a personal life, on the other an impersonal, creative process. In the essay "Literature and Psychology," of 1933, Jung says that the artist's work has very little to do with his personal life, except as the circumstances of his life allow it to be released; there is a distinction between the human being and the artist, who is "objective and impersonal—even inhuman—for as an artist he is his work, and not a human being."¹² Though Jung does not speculate about whether the economic use of one's energy determines his personal "happiness" or "unhappiness," it might be that in the case of such physically weak artists as Kafka and Kierkegaard unhappiness is inescapable—for in order to create the work they are evidently destined to create, they must sacrifice the expenditure of energy in normal human relations. Thus they experience their isolation as both gift and punishment, an inheritance they

¹² Carl Jung, "Literature and Psychology," in *Modern Man in Search of a Soul* (London: Kegan, Paul, 1933), p. 194.

have no choice but to accept yet must—ironically—suffer guilt over. Not all artists, of course, find themselves in this situation, of knowing with one part of their minds that they are fulfilling their destiny, perfectly, and have no need to explain or defend it, yet feeling with another part of their being a terrible anxiety, an alienation from the norms of their era—sensing, as Kafka did, that he is in both Paradise and Hell, and that to realize the former one must simply erase his self-inflicted perception of the latter. The artist-as-neurotic is by no means a universal phenomenon but, since the artist must conserve and direct his energy into his art and *away from* human relations, and will suffer if he fails to do this, the chances of his achieving a fluid, sane equilibrium between inner and outer worlds are much less than those for other people. Consider the deathly aphorism in Kierkegaard's *Either/Or* about the poet, that

. . . unhappy man who conceals profound anguish in his heart, but whose lips are so fashioned that when sighs and groans pass over them they sound like beautiful music. His fate resembles that of the unhappy men who are slowly roasted to death by a gentle fire in the tyrant Phalaris' bull—their shrieks could not reach his ear to terrify him, to him they sounded like sweet music. And people flock about the poet and say to him: do sing again; which means, would that new sufferings tormented your soul. . . .

Obviously, such an art is not cathartic for the artist; he is possessed, and resents his possession; he is capable of small, temporary victories, but generally he acknowledges his fate. In this parable of Kafka's, given here in its entirety, the melancholy acceptance of this strange fate is made clear:

The Sirens

These are the seductive voices of the night; the Sirens, too, sang that way. It would be doing them an injustice to think that they wanted to seduce; they knew they had claws and sterile wombs, and they lamented this aloud. They could not help it if their laments sounded so beautiful.

We do get the feeling, however, in reading Kafka's personal writings, that he really felt he could help it, unlike the Sirens; he felt somehow responsible for his sterility, his otherness, made all the more seductive because it is so beautiful. (Kafka did not doubt his talent as a writer; he knew he was inspired, that he

was "capable of everything," and that if he simply wrote the first sentence that came into his head it would possess "perfection"—an incredibly confident statement for a twenty-seven-year-old to make.¹³) This may be one of the reasons he left his most ambitious works unfinished, and even requested that Max Brod burn those manuscripts he had not yet published. He was conscious of himself as seductive, as powerful, as possibly deadly to those who might not understand him, because they were not equal to his vision. He spoke of the "fall into sin" in his conversations with the seventeen-year-old Gustav Janouch, then asked the boy not to brood on his words. "My seriousness might act like poison on you. You are young."¹⁴ At the same time he believed that his art was far more than the transformation of Franz Kafka's agonies into objective images; it is the ecstasy of "raising the world into the pure, the true, and the immutable."¹⁵

Like the Hunter Gracchus, he can neither ascend nor descend.

But though the expulsion from Paradise is a permanent fact, it is also a permanent fact that we are in Paradise. The analytic mind is a "chain . . . long enough to give [man] the freedom of all earthly space"; the world is by this time filled with men's eager rationalizations about the "fall" and their relationship to it. But it may be argued—madly, brilliantly—that the "whole visible world is perhaps nothing more than the rationalization of a man who wants to find peace for a moment" (from "Paradise"). What is the visible world, then, in Kafka's own life, but the continual building of Towers of Babel (or the hypothesized, comic erection of this Tower upon the Great Wall of China)—that is, his own books? K., exhausted by his aggressive maneuvers to win recognition from the Castle's officials, will finally be allowed to live in the Castle community as he had so desperately desired—not in consideration of his own efforts, of course, but only owing to "certain auxiliary circumstances." Kafka's writing, like K.'s strategies, are both what he must do and what is, at the same time, not enough to save him. Salvation comes from a higher source: it cannot be demanded.

¹³ *Diaries, 1910-1913*, p. 45. Martin Greenberg in his *The Terror of Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1968) begins his detailed and illuminating study of Kafka as an artist with this quotation.

¹⁴ Janouch, p. 127.

¹⁵ Diary entry for September 25, 1917. *Diaries*, p. 187.

The Castle, like the more dramatic, more tightly-constructed *The Trial*, is not a tragic work unless one identifies with the confused hero. It is a brilliant expression of the helplessness with which the conscious mind fights the unconscious, the comic-grotesque struggle of the intellect to know its soul; that it is so puzzling a work to many readers, and so unsatisfying, attests only to the fact that its basic assumptions are foreign to the assumptions of our era. Yet the Castle, imagined as Kafka's European, historical, vaguely sinister expression of the same primordial force that Lao Tzu calls the "Tao," is clearly that static or purposeless truth that rests in eternity and is realized only within the stilled, unstriving mind:

When K. looked at the Castle, often it seemed to him as if he were observing someone who sat quietly there gazing in front of him, not lost in thought and so oblivious of everything, but free and untroubled, as if he were alone with nobody to observe him, and yet must notice that he is observed. . . . (p. 128)

What K. wants from the Castle, most specifically from the official Klammm, is, in his own words, "difficult to express": there is no reason, really, for his meeting Klammm, any more than there is any reason for Klammm's wanting to meet him. Klammm and K. are united, and not simply in the body of Frieda; they are united already, but K.'s perpetual motion of the intellect will not allow him to see this. However grotesque Klammm may seem—and the forms which the Unconscious may take are far, far more grotesque than those Kafka usually chooses—he is yet divine, he is beyond reproach. It is pointless for K. to ask questions about the unfathomable Klammm. He is warned when a woman tells him, "Where is the man who could hinder me from running to Klammm if Klammm lifted his little finger? Madness, absolute madness: one begins to feel confused oneself when one plays with such mad ideas" (108). But he ignores this warning and the entire novel is a way of confusing us, a way of demonstrating that this is what life is, this is truly what life is for most people, these small spurts of activity, these trivial, abortive events, delusive emotions, misunderstandings that grow into ever more complex misunderstandings, then fade, abruptly, only to be replaced by new worries. K. creates his own problem, then tries to solve it. The problem-solving mechanism of the human mind will begin to create,

spontaneously, its own objects of perception, its own problems, if the deeper, more human, more natural aspect of existence is suppressed. K. says, in effect, "Where the Castle is, there shall I be." Freud, in declaring, "Where Id is, there shall Ego be," articulates most clearly the Western concept of the "Id" as a negative and perhaps even unhuman part of the psyche, and implies that the Ego's task, its very destiny, is to conquer the Id, to know it. But once the very basis of life is feared—once the relationship between conscious and unconscious mind is seen as a combative one—sanity itself is no longer possible, though men may keep going for generations without collapsing, except as collective units. To make war against one's own self is suicidal; at the very least, it is ludicrous.

In a passage deleted from the manuscript of *The Castle*, K. learns of Barnabas' initial excitement over K.'s arrival as the Land-Surveyor, for *he*, Barnabas, has been fighting for his appointment for three years, "all in vain, [with] not the slightest success, only disgrace, torment, time wasted. . . ." (p. 467). K.'s arrival, then, seen from Barnabas' and Olga's point of view is, in a masterly piece of Kafkan comedy, a kind of salvation. How mad! K. tells her that hearing this is like "listening to stories about your misery as if it were my own. . . ." Which of course it is, exactly. Kafka could have invented a character subordinate to Barnabas and Olga, then, who took heart at Barnabas' evident success (his appointment as Castle messenger); and a character subordinate to that one, and so on to infinity. There is no writer who has dramatized so well the basic hopelessness of the logical, empirical, fact-accumulating method, not even Lewis Carroll; only Proust, in his brilliant choice of social life as *the* metaphor for spiritual degradation, outdoes Kafka in descriptions of needless confusion and ennui.

The Castle is a parable, and one is always defeated in parable. But not in reality. Therefore, K. is "saved" outside the confines of the novel as it exists, in its unfinished form; Kafka intended to allow him some measure of happiness, however small, since he is to be informed on his death bed after that the Castle officials have decided he may remain in the Castle community after all, owing to circumstances that have nothing to do with his efforts. As Lao Tzu expresses it:

Returning is the motion of the Tao.

Yielding is the way of the Tao.

The ten thousand things are born of being.

Being is born of not being. (Chapter 40, complete)

Ultimately, K. knows no more of the Castle than we know; he only knows the Castle community and its people—the “ten thousand things” which are born of and supported by a mysterious structure they cannot know, except to know that it is “Madness, absolute madness” to go against it. Is there a mystery about the Castle? Where is the mystery? Kafka said, in explanation of his dislike for detective fiction, that in real life mystery isn’t hidden in the background: “On the contrary! It stares one in the face. It’s what is obvious. So we do not see it. Every-day is the greatest detective story ever written. . . .”¹⁶ If the world is denuded of spiritual significance, as many modern writers seem to feel, what remains?—matter? Yet “matter,” or what is meant by the word “matter,” is as mysterious as spirit ever was; the term itself is only a way of pointing toward another mystery, in the pretense that it is somehow not a mystery but, being named “matter,” is solved. In creating a dark, comic, upside-down epic, in which the hero never gets any closer to his goal, yet is granted his wish as he lies dying, Kafka was expressing a timeless truth; but he had to express it in images suitable to his era. The artist, however anxious he may feel about being misinterpreted or even “poisonous,” cannot do otherwise than shape his vision according to the specific time in which he lives—as Kafka said of Picasso, seeing some cubist still-lives and paintings of deformed women, such art is not willful distortion, but a registering of the deformities which have not yet penetrated our consciousness. “Art is a mirror, which goes ‘fast,’ like a watch—sometimes.”¹⁷ Thomas Mann, whom Kafka admired (he especially liked “Tonio Kröger,” for obvious reasons), created in *Death in Venice* that doomed, solitary artist, Aschenbach, the brook fouled by ashes, who is “so busy with the tasks imposed upon him by his own ego and the European soul” that his joyless life is best symbolized by a clenched fist; never a relaxed open hand.¹⁸ Unable to integrate

¹⁶ Janouch, p. 133.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹⁸ *Death in Venice and Other Stories* (New York: Vintage, 1958), p. 6.

the fist (the active principle) with the open hand (the static principle), as K. of *The Castle* is unable to integrate the effortless peace represented by Frieda with his own masculine, combative personality, Aschenbach, suddenly released from the burden of history and civilization, discovers in himself an affinity with the beast, a bliss in pure abandon that extends the “no little innocent bliss” hoped for by Tonio Kröger to its logical psychological conclusion. Both Mann and Kafka registered the deformities of the era that had not yet penetrated the general consciousness, but in Kafka we find a possibility of transcendence not granted in Mann. Mann seems to us a historical novelist, then, a genius who analyzed the breakdown of civilization in Europe from the point of view of a European to whom that civilization—in its highest accomplishments—was unparalleled. Kafka, however, perhaps because of his Jewishness, perhaps because of his own temperament, seemed to identify with the ahistorical, the timeless, the spiritual; for him the drowning of the ego was a necessary experience, in order that something beyond the ego might emerge. For Mann, the failure of the ego unleashes violent, shameful, nightmarish, and basically sexual activities, both in fantasy and in “real life,” and the tragic problem for him—as it was for Freud—is that civilization and its restraints are necessary, therefore its discontents are necessary, so that individual neuroses may be absorbed in a larger neurosis. But where is the human spirit in all this? Safest, most secure, only in the unimaginative, hard-working, role-directed world of the bourgeois, which exhausts men’s energies both for good and evil. Kafka, as we know, did not fear the abyss—like Nietzsche, he was willing to pay the price of staring into it, of inviting it to stare back into him:

The truth is always an abyss. One must—as in a swimming pool—dare to dive from the quivering springboard of trivial everyday experience and sink into the depths, in order later to rise again—laughing and fighting for breath—to the now doubly illuminated surface of things.¹⁹

For Kafka, loss of ego was the only way into this abyss, and the “abyss”—in Oriental terms, the “Void”—is not necessarily nightmare, not necessarily Aschenbach’s feverish erotic dreams, but the undifferentiated primary Paradise itself. There, we can-

¹⁹ Janouch, p. 155.

not experience what is "good," because "good" and "evil" are not yet separated into opposing forces; nor does human language exist, let alone habits of civilization. Consciousness cannot be primary because it grows out of a prior condition of unconsciousness, into which it must someday return; and when consciousness sinks into sleep, this primary world rises, triumphant, incontestable. No activity of the ego, however ingenious and arrogant, can really erase from the memory the knowledge of an original, undifferentiated mind, which perhaps accounts for the desperation with which the ego attacks it when it is objectified by the poet, the artist, the mystic. The demand that a work of art be intelligible is one that can be made only by those to whom art itself is a threat, and not a way of participating in an ineffable experience. All of Kafka's writings are poetic expressions of the necessity of surrender to the soul's transformation, however terrifying it might be. The point is made graphically in "In The Penal Colony" that one already *is* his ultimate self, his fate, though only by contemplating the specific words tattooed upon his body can he know himself, can he be realized as a unique individual; or was the experiment with individuality in the West a failure, symbolized by the comically disintegrating torture machine? Does the Explorer leave the Penal Colony in order to explore another part of the world?

The typical Kafka hero's end is in his beginning: Joseph K. is arrested on the morning of his thirtieth birthday, and executed a year later. But the execution—the annihilation of his ego—begins on that morning when his landlady's cook fails to appear as usual with his breakfast, and, in a sense, it is already complete. Each defeat that follows the initial defeat is merely a temporal intensification of it, and the more hopeless one's case appears the more grasping one becomes. In *Paradise* without knowing it, one is in *Hell* and, there, one is insatiable—he carries inside him his own mortal hunger, which can never be satisfied by anything that is mortal. A number of Kafka characters are accused of being "insatiable"—the Hunger Artist, ironically, who cannot get enough of fasting; the man from the country who waits for so many fruitless years, at the doorway to the Law; Joseph K. himself, who demands a definite release, a final pardon for all time, but is told by the priest (the "prison chaplain") that "The verdict

is not suddenly arrived at, the proceedings only gradually merge into the verdict" (p. 264, *The Trial*). Joseph K. never realizes that his verdict, his sentence, his execution *are* himself, and that there is no self, no Joseph K., outside this. He cannot discover himself because he will not surrender to losing himself; refusing to make the human effort of a self-annihilation, he dies like a dog.

In his diary entries Kafka expressed the idea that this "ego-annihilation" might be possible through what he saw to be ordinary, uncomplicated life, that is, "normal" marriage. This too seemed to him a kind of abyss, a way of salvation, of stopping the fast-running clock. He speaks of the "infinite, deep, warm, saving happiness of sitting beside the cradle of one's child opposite its mother. . . ." And:

There is in it also something of this feeling: matters no longer rest with you, unless you wish it so. In contrast, this feeling of those who have no children: it perpetually rests with you, whether you will or no, every moment to the end, every nerve-racking moment, it perpetually rests with you, and without result. Sisyphus was a bachelor.²⁰

Yet the crossing-over to this state of mind necessitates an abandonment of the senses, in which the body of another somehow provides "salvation" for one; and Kafka cannot accept this. Like one of Flannery O'Connor's demented saints, Kafka is really too pure to consider anything not "spiritual"—even obscenity must be spiritual in order to have value. K. of *The Castle* makes love to Frieda on the tavern floor, amidst puddles of beer and piles of refuse, and he cannot even resist a triumphant shout for Klammer's benefit—a needless, self-destructive taunt, though certainly a futile one; what does Klammer care if the Land-Surveyor has stolen his mistress? By now he has forgotten her, though not as ordinary people "forget"; her existence is erased in his memory, she does not exist for him at all. One cannot acquire salvation through the efforts of another, not even through the willing, warm, maternal bodies of the mistresses of Castle and Court officials, since salvation comes only from within: a psychological experience only. Kafka did not seem to believe, and perhaps for him it was quite true, that the experience of erotic love can create another "self," a personality that is the result of the lovers'

²⁰ *Diary*, p. 7.

spiritual unity. It may also be that Kafka's religious and cultural background forbade any spiritualization of physical love, for women, perhaps, are not quite equal to men:

Women are snares, which lie in wait for men on all sides in order to drag them into the merely finite. They lose their dangers if one voluntarily falls into one of the snares. But if, as a result of habit, one overcomes it, then all the jaws of the female trap open again.²¹

This not St. Paul, or Augustine, but Kafka himself, speaking frankly to the boy, Janouch, after he had happened to see him with a girl.

It cannot be through erotic love, then, that one can find his liberation from the ego, in Kafka's imagination; he must consciously set out to explore the infinity within. Kafka spoke, in a much-quoted remark, of books as axes wielded against the "frozen sea within," and it is clear from his diary entry for January 16, 1922, that he quite deliberately approached what he called an "assault upon the last earthly frontier." Unlike Rimbaud, who threw himself into activities that might assure a "systematic derangement of all the senses," Kafka seems to have let go: to have stopped struggling. In a curious passage at the beginning of *The Castle*—curious because Kafka is not writing naturalistic fiction, and has no need to substantiate a character's previous existence—K. remembers when, as a boy, he climbed a churchyard wall and seemed to experience it as a "victory for life" (p. 38). The victory is there, inside; it sinks beneath the surface of consciousness, but is not extinct by any means. The "victory" is a kind of initial baptism, a baptism of the ego that restores its innocence, and allows Kafka the artist (though not Kafka the man) that secret knowledge that he has perfection within his grasp, that the simplest sentence he writes is "already perfect." At such moments Kafka is not Kafka, but his art; he *is* the sentence he writes, and the sentence he writes is an expression of Kafka's own perfection—as an artist, that is. What of the external world, what of "normal" life? It must be abandoned, finally. On that day in January, 1922, Kafka allowed his introspective energies full release so that the inner and outer worlds drew apart and their separate times could no longer coincide. "The clocks are not in unison," he writes. "The inner one runs crazily at a devilish

²¹ Janouch, p. 178.

or demoniac or in any case inhuman pace, the outer one limps along at its usual speed." The two worlds then threaten to split apart. Kafka saw the agony of life as the ego's fear of the future, and not the future itself, which cannot be experienced; an imagining of the future without that self. It is not the higher life that knows Good or Evil, or dread, but only the self in its fear of ascending to the higher life as if, in releasing itself even from fear, it would suffer a tremendous loss.

In spite of Kafka's interest in Chinese philosophy, he seems to have been unable, for most of his life, to reconcile the inner and outer worlds. He remained preoccupied with guilt until the last year or two of his life when, according to Max Brod, he experienced an awakening of his energies and a desire to live that contrast sharply with the Kafka of the years before; ironically, his experience parallels K's of *The Castle*. His works, however, reflect the anguish of his constant struggle to synthesize the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life, to realize himself, Kafka, in terms of Life. Perhaps it was a fear of losing language, of losing the means by which he defined his soul, as he hints in his diary entry of 1922: "Evil does not exist; once you have crossed the threshold, all is good. Once in another world, you must hold your tongue."²² Either a continual self-destroying "assault" upon the earthly frontier, or a transformation into the Void, into silence. How was Kafka to reconcile himself to so unhuman a universe, except by imagining himself continually as a parable?—his life as a series of parables in which logically incompatible opposites are so beautifully wedded?

²² P. 205. Kafka's own division of worlds allows us to interpret his writing as both negative (in terms of history) and positive (in terms of the human spirit). If one believes himself trapped in history, in matter, then "Count Westwest" of *The Castle* is an extinct God for all time and the Castle is no more than a delusion, the tomb of God as Nietzsche saw the churches of his time to be the "tombs and sepulchres of God." However, Kafka certainly believed in the individual's ability to detach himself from history and to achieve a transcendence of the merely historical.

DAVID BROMIGE

This time not shot

This time not shot—
unmarked by any accident,
no sheen yet of decay—
no blurring of your form—

this much one knows,
a disease of life
has done for you. Maybe
it's how lifelike you looked,

dull brown & yellow,
makes me tremble,
now as then—the day
I found you, making you

seem vulnerable, then as now
the thin
thing poking like a frozen flickering
out from the opened beak

most catches me.
I must've heard you sing.
Dad tells me
mother loved the birds. A fact

I remembered when he said.
She died
far away from me
in time as space.

Nor is there any link
between the two
excepting where I think
in the circuits of this brain.

You do not come again
or words are ghosts.
But then you are not here
for all I would present

went with the time—
but some idea
with you within
presses out these words.

This is some other form—
nothing's saved in it
from all our distances
but distance,

distance, distance singing,
to be kept
from us, & the shining
that the mind

imposes, on what
if not the mind
insists is different—
your death & life

suffering no interference
if this form to hold
my grief is risen
from these thoughts concerning you—

acknowledging you've gone beyond
what any one can remedy,
experiencing the chance of waste,
in this perplexity about identity,

between the dead & living,
where she is always present,
whose breasts & arms were
present where

language thought & feeling all
began in me, because
these three are one
& make me want to see a frozen tongue.

A Rime

The great horned owl—
I call you, never having seen you
to my satisfaction, though that flapping
darker than the eucalyptus branches
the night I did go looking—

but the hoo-hoo-hu-hoo, that's the sign
my book identifies you by. Believed to presage
death, it says. And that that's incorrect,
but not entirely, you hoot to scare up game
—or hoot, & scare up game—

some animal that, safe,
takes alarm, scurries out,
as if to meet you—

you call at intervals
so spaced I think them regular,
count, & it comes again, I come
to count on it. One morning

a large owl perching on our boundary-fence
couldn't've been you, the book says
likely the short-eared kind,
it often flies by day. I was eating breakfast,

suddenly, an unexpected presence—I looked up
or felt what I had glimpsed, & then
looked out—at such a matter-of-factness.
That then flew off. I shook, with what it was.

Your call comforts, I prefer it to the silence,
now I think of that, that most nights are.
I—said with much assurance,
a place to be
even as this well-lit house,

beside the fire. Say I was tired,
cold, & somewhere out in it—

if you didn't call I can imagine
calling for you,
if only to enter the trance.

Next Love

The heat put it in my mind
I guess, so when I saw that glow
on the horizon eastward, growing
while I watched, the prairie
all around me dry, ready for fire

my excitement told me
this was what I saw, burning
everywhere, fixed
by the wonder for five minutes
when I thought about it later, when I thought
to run back to the house & let them know

there was something someone ought to cope with,
somehow. Before I could the flickering
I'd read out of the wavering
as flame, congealed

till what was then revealed
as a huge moon, began its rise
to be a second marvel, a moon that large & orange,
complete,
contained—

then the familiar
diminishment & paling as it rode
higher, that ache
asking some participation that its shape
refuses, a lonely
circle, where the poem begins.

Flamingos of the Soda Lakes

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bobbing like buoys; and they swill great drafts
of fuming earth-
water through the leathery-soft petals
of their inverted bills.
As they drink they dance, they long-
leggedly skip and trot, leaping in steam-baths,
a splendid
prancing on their arrowy stiff limbs,
hopping up and down,
teetering, shifting their top-heavy
weight lopsidedly from leg to leg-pole, never losing
their balance;
their necks undulating slowly, rhythmically,
adjusting the spoons
of their half-submerged upside-down bills
as they guzzle the boiling waters, keeping time
with their legs'
waltzing gait a-waggle from side to side,
while they shudder in exquisite
pain: whether more from the quaffed hot
rivers siphoning up their long necks and scalding
their throats,
or more from the fierce hot foamy effervescence
of the wading pools
that scorch their frail lower legs. . . .
Now many are ruffling wingquills and little nubs
of tail-feathers,
warning rivals to make way and stand clear,
jealously guarding
their small dunking-and-dipping tracts;
and a few are butting each other with their flanks
and tufted rears,
jockeying closer and closer to the wellsprings,
where the fresh mineral
overflow waters from underground streams
seep up through the lakeshore mud; closer to the pure
clear waters
of health, earth-filtered and effervescing,
where the hissing sub-
terranean gases meet the clean open air,

mixing their purities, cleansing over and over:
 refinings:
 earth air water light: where the sizzling
 earth-waters flow
 into the fetid, brackish soda of the dense
 alkaline lake which, imbibed in large drafts, is noxious
 like seawater—
 soda and salt, breeders of multitudes
 of unicellular life-
 motes, poisons to higher forms: life-givers,
 life-takers.
 Flamingos, gladly suffering throat-burns
 leg-burns,
 suffering infernal hots for the pure, dance
 away the agonies
 of hellfires for earth's life-elixirs,
 dancing for flames of wet that cannot singe a feather,
 dancing
 to fill with firewater to satiety,
 to fill with flames
 that cannot sear the long white angel
 plumes of their wings: a dancing to satiety—
 satieties
 of thirstfire—a thirst dance!

Shakuhachi

(for Doug Stout)

Three weeks of drill—
 assorted blowing exercises.
 Three weeks to perfect
 a single
 clear short toot. Lips cunningly pursed to the flanged
 mouthpiece of the carved,
 thick jointed hollow pipe

of bamboo: personal,
intimate
the strange voice of the wood, concealed bird-throats echoing
in hollow stalks
slickened erect from the earth
like reeds, or sawgrass—
hoarding
secret songs of the wind, whistling for years in cavernous
tunnels of the wood's
body. . . . The whole torso a single
elongated tube-throat
waiting,
waiting for its rooky trills and wind-primed, stored warbles
to be released by one pair
of exquisitely puckered man-lips,
and skillfully twisted
fluttering
man-tongue. The sawed-off segment of undying bamboo attuning
its sapling grace
and lithe driftwood twists
to the clasp of one pair
of hands
fueling the curved bone of its marrowless length with palm-oil
as gnarled walking stick—
no mere serviceable cane—
is nurtured by the handprint's
whorled
love of its master. Man & slotted pipe. Snake charmer
& hypnotized, stiffened subject.
A duet with the tailless and tongueless
operatic serpent.
Voiceless
mouth which vibrato or tremolo mouths may summon to voice.

ALAIN

Selections from *The Gods*

Alain once said: "If my pseudonym had been seen through by everyone, and I were writing for the eyes of opinion, I would no longer have any freedom. . . . The less they talk about Alain, the freer and more intelligent Alain will be." The man and his work are still a mystery to most of the English-speaking world. The name "Alain" first appeared under a series of short essays printed in the Rouen Dispatch in 1903. Their author, Émile Auguste Chartier, was a high school teacher and political radical who was to become one of the strongest and most indispensable voices of his time. He was born at Mortagne-au-Perche, Normandy, in 1868, attended the local school at Alençon, then the Lycée de Vanves, where he studied philosophy under Jules Lagneau: "I had the luck to spend three years in that favorable climate. I experienced the Spirit and Eternity; in that sense I was a Spinozist, and I still am. I have a horror of short-term ideas. . . ." After graduating from the École Normale Supérieure in 1892, he taught in various high schools, ending up as professor of advanced rhetoric at the Lycée Henri IV in Paris. Simone Weil and Jean-Paul Sartre were among his students there, and the former became a close friend. Alain called himself a "petit-bourgeois radical"; he was active on the Left for more than twenty years, helped to found free night universities for workers in Lorient, Rouen, and Paris, and attributed his beginnings as a writer to his "lively political passions." Though he was strongly opposed to the policy of war, he volunteered in 1914 and served in the heavy artillery until 1917. During his life he published more than sixty books and collections of essays. He is one of the most distinctive stylists in French prose. In 1951, the year of his death, he was awarded the first Grand Prix National de Littérature. The four pieces printed here are from his book Les Dieux, written in 1934.

[R.P.]

Labor (Bk. I, Ch. 5)

A CHILD IS AN IDEALIST as long as he knows nothing of labor; and the same is true of any man who lives like a child. That, in brief, is the idea. It is well hidden. How many jobs there are in which polishing the lamp is simply a form of prayer! In a forgotten novel, *Balao*, the story of a monkey that was taught to speak and dress like a man, I have come across a very enlightening passage. I take stories at their word. This Balao, then, a fairly civilized monkey, went to the Jardin des Plantes one night to find his brother Gabriel, dressed him up, and took him around from cabaret to cabaret. But Gabriel had the unfortunate habit of throwing himself upon whatever took his fancy, like a lady's hat decorated with artificial fruit. After the commotion and flight, Balao taught Gabriel the following lesson: "This is how humans act; before they take what they want to eat, they have to show their intentions by laying down some money." A child might have the same idea about money; and it remains unchanged in many grown men. The Duc de Villeroy, when he was about to go out gambling, asked his footman, "Have you put gold in my pockets?" The words of an overgrown child, but no more unreasonable than the idea of the self-styled physicist who said that there was enough energy in a copper penny to turn a thousand machines. He was too naive to remind himself that the energy in a penny, being in repose, would have to be separated into particles before it could do any work, just as a spring has to be coiled up, and that one would obtain as a result no more than the equivalent, at best, of the energy spent in working against the forces of cohesion in the penny. The noble duke also did not consider that the power of purchasing with gold rests on all of the work done in the merchant world from morning to evening, on great labors and great fatigue. And, for reasons contained in childhood itself, the child cannot understand that the treasures of Aladdin are the fruits of labor. That is why all of these characters live and think in enchanted ways with regard to that portion of the world that is no more for them than a spectacle. We know that Bishop Berkeley was persuaded that the world is only imagery within

us, the imagery of our thoughts. For him the world was a bishop's supper. And the child-man Berkeley went as far as Newfoundland to preach, and came back, still persuaded that our perceptions have no substance. He let himself be carried by the ship, while others hoisted the sails. The passenger's job is no doubt the stupidest in the world; which is why there are voyages and voyages. We come back to the child who, in that estate, is at first only a passenger, with no power to guide himself and no need to. His proper labor, as I have said, is to grow, like the famous lilies which neither toil nor spin but rise up naked in the fields. The child, however, is given clothing, shelter, and food; and lives as in a fairy tale. This is the idea that we must gather at its root.

Maine de Biran, the sub-prefect, touched the world by thoughtfully testing the resistance of his desk; and his *Memoirs* concerning touch, sight, and the other senses, have endured almost alone among the many philosophical treatises of his loquacious century. But the reason for believing what we hear is already behind us. The sub-prefect was a most positive thinker. He observed that we know as the real world only what we have revealed by an effort of will. For example, to explore a faint odor by purposefully sniffing it, is to make the odor dependent upon us, and at the same time to know that it is not dependent upon us. Our sense of touch immediately clarifies this first thought. For to receive a shock is only to feel ourselves; therefore we know only our own feeling. But it is entirely otherwise if we explore the surface of a solid object, for example the desk of a sub-prefect. For, governed by our own will, brushing the object with our fingers or leaning our full weight against it, we get a more or less moving impression, and one that can be repeated, and we discover all of these sensible events by an effort and a rule of motion that depend only upon us. In this process the world withdraws from us and begins to take on its own existence. In short, what makes existence is not appearance, it is appearance under the commandment and under the condition of labor. And what makes the world known as a reality are the bonds between labor and its effects, those laws, in other words, of which the mere spectator can have no certainty. That is why Maine de Biran says that vision is idealist.

There is no labor possible in exploring something with our eyes. I turn my head; other colors come into sight, even the whole of the sky, with no difficulty; but we also know very well that vision alone gives us no knowledge of anything. Our philosopher wished only to insist upon the fact that an active sense of touch, on the contrary, gives us the experience of reality that comes from effort. That is still only half the idea; effort is not labor; and the labor of the sub-prefect was almost all magic. But he was on the right path.

Leaving aside the valuable things he said about the blind geometer, the only profound man, and about the lighthearted geometer of the visible world, I want simply to move one step beyond his idea, to compare blind labor, which feels the weight of the world on its tools, with the easy contemplation of a colorful spectacle that changes instant by instant with the slightest movement. Travel, it is true, is a form of labor, though we often give up and go by car. But taking even the most favorable case of an explorer or a mountain climber, in which felt labor accompanies the changes of spectacle, we will observe that there is no proportion between the labor and the change; it remains something miraculous, an appearance reminiscent of fairy tales. On the other hand, blind labor, working from one end of a field to the other, never ceases to pay out a stable change, when the laborer is established to continue it. Here there is no suspicion of idealism, because what is felt in the exchange between shoulders, arms, plow, and the resisting earth, is the antagonistic term, strongly bound in all of its parts by a non-arbitrary law. It is no small business to change the appearance of fallow land into the appearance of plowed land and it is labor that gives consistency to this series of visions, as the most profound physics has finally understood. Therefore when the peasant takes a rest and looks around, it is not at the treasures of Aladdin, nor any other kind of treasure, it is at his own labor, which he feels at the same time as he sees it. He has conquered his vision; he is master of it. This world is no longer a game. And two notions appear at the same time, which are correlatives, the notion of power and the notion of necessity. Of power, because action does not cease where knowing begins; of necessity, because it is only through labor that one is assured of the

fidelity of the world, which could also be called the inertia of the world, which wipes out all promises and is worth more than promises; for on condition that one obeys and delves oneself, as a picking and shoveling creature, into the tissue of things, one learns finally what it means to will, which is also to will what one does not will. But I admit that if the peasant should happen to dig up a pot of gold, he would begin to dream, I mean to dream his own life; he would become a magician.

From which I have learned the full meaning of the word vision. For popular language never weighs its words, it suddenly throws out the most profound idea, since it understands by the word vision, or what is merely seen, a spectacle that is absolutely deceptive; deceptive, even if we should be certain of its sequence and recurrence; such no doubt were the eclipses to an Egyptian; such are they to a computer, because thirty zeros cost it no effort; and it took a kind of blind attention and refusal of spectacle to introduce the idea of labor into events that are as far away from our hands as the movements of the heavenly bodies, the birth and decay of suns. But there is always danger in the work of the clever student, who is never more than an intelligent visionary. For, says Maine de Biran, the geometer who can see is satisfied with the spectacle he has made for himself with pencil and pen. He moves from evidence to evidence, from intuition to intuition; he lets the truth enter all at once. Whereas the blind geometer, who is the true geometer, starts with nothing; all that he thinks, he makes; he constructs and reconstructs his thought. A triangle for him is no longer a secret which looks back at us, so boldly that the clever student could not help drawing the eye of God within it. No, the triangle is a path that has been followed and remembered, according to the rules of physical movement; from which the proof is born, always as a form of self-awareness, and of understanding, as language so energetically expresses it. Yet this labor of the hands and of memory, which is also a pledge to oneself, is still only an imitation of true labor; and the difference between the two geometers is of no importance, as long as the geometer only gives birth to geometry; for geometry is always a question of possible worlds. On the other hand, if one wishes to push geometry towards concrete things, by means of mechanics and

physics, it is the hands that will find the object; the idealist eye will never find it. However, this is not the place to explain so difficult an idea. I wanted to pay homage to Maine de Biran, because he has made me understand that visionaries are light-hearted men, alienated men, dreamers of the world, who never stop waiting for a miracle, that is, for treasure without work. These same visionaries seek proof of the existence of the world, without finding any; I can well believe it; they do not know what existence is. Theirs is always the bishop's supper.

The child's situation is the same, though more natural. And I am trying to explain how childhood experience, though it is, and always is, an experience of the world, is the beginning of all error. The child knows nothing of labor. Games are a form of effort without lasting results; games are written in the sand, like hopscotch. Erase them and start over. We never find in them the sequence that exists in labor, where the result immediately becomes a means. This difference, which shows clearly in games that are wholly fictional, like parades, songs, dances, ceremonies, is for all that even more striking when games imitate various kinds of work; for nothing gets done; everything is spoken out or mimed; games do not grapple with the world; the child is fed and housed by other means. He who never grapples with the world, is ignorant of the world. He who does not know how to carry the law of labor down to concrete things, and bind them together according to the blind man's mechanics, cannot know what it costs to make a field of wheat appear in place of weeds. Everything is possible; anything can happen. And this, joined to the broken perceptions and magic journeys of our earliest years, explains fairly well how everything is a miracle. Fairy tales express the surprises of a traveller who was transported while he slept; but on a deeper level fairy tales express a real life in which everything is obtained by prayer, in which nothing is gained by labor. The world nevertheless is as it is, and appears as it appears. But the mind, that god of gods, first plays in it like Ariel, and deceives itself without inventing anything. Over the past few days, while I have been writing, the harvest fields have changed into piles of wheat and piles of straw; and I knew nothing about it; I only saw that the decor had changed, through the agency of the earth-spirits who appear at the end of a field

and arrange such things. My bread is brought to me in the same way. Where does bread come from? And who takes care of it? Even if I were to become concerned with it myself, even if I presented to myself the successive spectacle of plowing, sowing, growth, harvest, milling and baking, it would give me only a better connected dream, I would not really know that I am nourished by men's pains. We are children and visionaries for a good part of the things we use, for almost all of them. The visionary geometer is fed on perfect triangles as he is fed on his little matinal bread, another miracle.

The Seasons (Bk. II, Ch. 3)

Order is above. When man lifts up his eyes, it is another, more virile form of prayer. Order is above, in the stars, in the phases of the moon, in the balancings of the sun. Order is here, in the sprouting grain, in the ripening harvest, in the messenger flowers; and in the yellow leaves. Nothing is deceptive. And therefore what we expect is precisely what happens. The brightening sky announces the sun, and no one asks for anything else. The sun is enough; the day is enough. Spring is good; when will it come? It is here in the anemones. And the time for sowing comes after the plowing and harrowing. The sun is not a magician who gives and withholds; to pray is to work. Plato cites an old proverb: "Who would dare call the sun a liar?" To believe the sun is to prepare the soil in winter and split firewood in August. An alert religion, that walks at the side of labor. Here is the celebration of the Annunciation, which is the essence of celebration. At this point I want to describe the religion that has no god, that celebrates the fidelity of nature, or the reconciliation of nature and man, and recognition in the strongest sense. I recognize the nightingale and the cuckoo. I recognize the swallow and the quail. I recognize the signs. I anticipate the event, embody it, name it; there is nothing behind it.

I enjoy describing our celebration of the sun, and I like to imagine what a primitive man would think of it. What do I mean? We copy the outline of the sun in the soil with the leaves

of the iris; we carry around the image of bread; we plant roses. The primitive man will look for something more; and we will also. Celebrations must be brought down to what they really are. They are greater and more beautiful that way, just as a poem in which everything is real is the most beautiful of poems. We plant roses with no purpose in mind, simply because roses scatter their petals on the wind. We must not think that primitive peoples who celebrate the Spring are celebrating anything other than their own joy. As flowers open, men sing, and that is all there is to say. Do not look for gods here; this faith celebrates itself.

The celebration of Easter is the same everywhere, provided that it follows winter. I wonder if people who are overly favored by nature really celebrate the sun; it is a reasonable cult, but not for them. It is more likely that, living too easily in their daily existence, yet prey to unforeseeable catastrophes, they are reduced to a violent fetishism. You cannot wish to be a peasant. Our chain of celebrations advances with the sun. Easter celebrates resurrection, in the light of clear evidence; Christmas celebrates birth, under the star of the annunciation; from far off, in the cold and snow. The Fête-Dieu is the day of thanksgiving; it celebrates happiness, which is the most beautiful kind of thanks. The wine festival is more tumultuous; the flight of the sun can already be felt; we bottle our joy; but in vain, for human sentiment must follow the sun and the yellowing leaves into the mists of November, where the commemoration of the dead takes its proper place. Homer sought the dead in the Cimmerian mists. But I suppose that the commemoration of the dead was first celebrated in attitude; it was an exchange of signs and a sudden ageing; and it still is. The celebrations of the spirit cannot live by the spirit alone. The decor of the world and the backdrop of the seasons are necessary. Those who celebrate Christmas in summer and Easter in autumn, as they do in Capetown or in Australia, foster irreligion; in such decreed celebrations the body is out of tune with the spirit. The whole of Christianity must rest upon the whole of paganism. But the savants are city-dwellers and work by lamplight; and even if they should look for some vestiges of solar myth in the higher gods, they will see no more than a recollection of the old cult in the new.

Memory cannot do very much; but the power of the sun is always the same. And the darkening of the year will always send us into retirement, nursing a sort of anger, which is only prudence. Christmas lacks strength and calls up the image of a child-god. But, not for any god, but because of the signs of false spring, people rejoice too early and devour their provisions, which is carnival, a celebration marked by contorted madness, a celebration with no future, promptly followed by penitence; for the cold weather returns, and with the cold, the fear of shortage, Lent, which lasts up to the explosion of Easter, though there is still a touch of winter in the idea of death and resurrection. These great movements are the movements of our joys and cares, and myths are first no more than the gestures with which we withdraw from the world or open out to it. Clams and starfish celebrate the tides. The sun waxes and ebbs like the tide; we open and close our shells; that is the ground of our ceremonies, which is embroidered upon by a variety of political beliefs. And to protect ourselves from history, we must not forget that childhood is political before it is pastoral, and that the gods in human form are once again the first to stand around each cradle. It is no less necessary to appreciate this separation of nature and man, which occurs in every man through his first labors, though the city and Caesar never cease to weave new garlands, garlands of iron, for our garlands of flowers, and thus revive the helmeted gods of the golden age. We will notice that peasant religion arrives at reason through its feeling for the great cycles which are the rhythm of our life; but that reason of State, which is strong in children, twists reason into the folds of another necessity, represented by the policeman at the corner of our country roads.

The gods are composite, as we are; I would even say that they are a composite of various animals, as we are. We still find the lamb, the ox, and the eagle, mixed in with branches and flowers, in the ornaments of our cathedrals as in the metaphors of Bossuet. Perhaps we sense that a religion without images would no longer be a religion. Pushing further ahead, and staying close to our solar existence, we will ask ourselves if thought without images is still thought. The answer is physiological, and cannot be otherwise.

Das Was bedenke, mehr bedenke Wie. But physiology extends beyond the living body, as Darwin saw. Our environment shapes us, the sun shapes us, our prey shapes us, our companions shape us. As an organism reveals all of these things in its form, so religion, whichever it be, reveals in its thousandfold form all of its circumstances, and the form of man. And its real heartwood, if it has any, is enveloped in layer upon layer of bark, as it should be. Metaphor reverently covers what cannot go naked and live. Thus philosophy, in its imprudence, never ceases to lose the very spirit it seeks, while religion never ceases to lose it by saving it. We must live between the two.

If we think in terms of the seasons and of peasant celebrations, we will think truly; if we think of the country before the city, we will think justly, for the city cannot feed itself. Neither can the spirit feed itself. A temple gives us more to think about than a book, and temples are more at home in the fields and woods than standing above crowded buildings and torrents of men. The true pilgrim's route is empty of men but covered with footprints. For the present, on our pilgrimage, I will not leave the human form standing between us and religion. There are thousands of reasons for believing in man, and thousands of reasons for not believing in him. There is only one reason for believing in Spring: it is life itself. "Be reverent before the dawning day," says the little uncle of Jean-Christophe. It is to awaken, it is to believe again. Life, in Darwin's eyes, implies the judgment that the world is good. To pray is therefore first of all to adapt, or, better, to recognize our aptitude. Which is confirmed by Stendhal, the after-dinner melancholic, when he says that life is made up of mornings, otherwise called joyful beginnings. The songs of evening have the color of sadness; prayer at that hour is entirely spiritual; the world does not sustain it; it is itself disappearing. On the other hand, the song of morning rebounds off of the given world and the spirit leaps out of itself. Without the noise of the street vendors nothing would get done and nothing would be thought. The city is full of lost mornings, and the gods are sad there.

The Gods of Homer (Bk. III, Ch. 6)

The gods are moments of man. This is not an abstract thought, it is written into the battles of the *Iliad* and the wanderings of Ulysses. Besides, once the gods have taken human form, how shall we recognize them if not by a grace of movement, a force, a glance, a word of advice, all the eminent signs of man? Or else in sudden impulses of hope, audacity, fear? Man looks about him or behind him for his friend, his ally, his enemy, whom such feelings or impulses ordinarily announce. Whether he finds them or not hardly matters, for man himself appears and disappears. The heat of battle, which drives everyone towards where the dust is thickest, carries along pell-mell men and the gods. These noonday visions are perfectly true. While theology, which is only a philosophy that lacks distance, can attempt to dissolve the new god into ancient nature and Jupiter into the immensity of the sky, poetry, adhering more closely to the actual movements of man, never ceases to vanquish the pantheistic monster, and to portray man simply as man, so naturally superhuman. For the miraculous is common experience in war, be it that the wounded enemy is lost in a mist; that courage and fear pass overhead like meteors; that the sword-strokes carry by a kind of guiding foresight; or that one slip of the sword or bow announces others, which is only too true; be it that a friend protects us without our noticing it; or that a man is mysteriously separated from his friend, as if by a curse. When the warrior flies off in pursuit of a phantom, it is only a misguided loss of temper, and perfectly natural; but the same event is supernatural, the very same, as we have seen it with our own eyes. And the death of Patroclus, disarmed by Mars, stripped of his strength as of his armor, is precisely the death of an exhausted man. Man does not know himself. Though he knows that bread, meat, wine give him his dose of courage, never infinite, he does not really believe it. It is in the nature of courage, as of all passions, to look for other causes. Ajax says that a god urges him on; which means that he feels his hands and feet moving by themselves. And if, on the other hand, Jupiter today gives victory to the Trojans, it means that the Achaians' knees will not sustain them any longer. These meta-

phors are all true; their lines are well-drawn; the scene is supernaturally what it would be physiologically. The Jupiter of Phidias is no more than a man; and it can even be said that he is greater than man only because he is perfectly human. Thus the battles in the *Iliad* are simply battles. Of course Achilles also fights with the Scamander, and that is more theological than religious; still it is true that the river fights back like a river in flash-flood; which also happens. But the pure battle, the battle that is sought out and celebrated, is a human event, utterly human; all of its surprises and brilliant moments bear man's imprint. We must grasp this moment of human strength when, the monsters of nature having been conquered and despised, the hero is the sole enemy worthy of man.

On the other hand, through the amassing of men, and the meditation of courage in the face of itself, nature is returned to its own state and is simply nature, as the Homeric similes express, revealing in a flash, and even in the thick of combat, this other truth which is no longer deformed by passions. Men are flailed like wheat; but this chaff is simply chaff in the wind. Snow is ordinary snow in the image, and falls according to the law of things. The lion is simply a lion who leaps over the stockade; his claws are simply claws. And the woodcutter on the mountain is simply a man who chops down trees, and is hungry. The shield of Achilles, in the most striking contrast to the fury of the man who carries it, shows us images of nature as it is, of labors, of marriages, of all that passes and returns and begins again; here war itself is only plundering, another kind of harvest, as if the divine blacksmith had wished to inscribe upon his work the truth that there are no gods. And that is just what the shield signifies, with its strength so precisely defined in layers of ox-hide and sheet-brass. Labor is everything and does everything. This is an eternal text and the true mirror of man. But Achilles does not take the time to read it, nor does he give anyone else time to read it.

When the dust has settled and the dead are burned, the idea that the hero is a god takes a strange turn. The human form seems closed in upon this great secret. The gods are everywhere. An unknown young man who gives directions, is perhaps Mercury. A wise friend is Mentor, or Minerva. And, as Ulysses

is hidden under a beggar's rags, it could just as easily be a god who shoulders his sack and begs from door to door. This prodigious warning, which is only wisdom, is the most beautiful fruit of heroic madness. For the hero always comes back to ordinary life; he eats, drinks, and sleeps. He is my brother man. And Ulysses, wrapped up and sleeping under the leaves, like a shepherd's fire, is Ulysses nonetheless. We must then extend a credit of honor and hospitality to every shape of man; and the idea that any stranger may be a god in disguise, is among those that the future will not diminish. The Christian can say no better. Or rather, he ought to say better. Man himself is the god. Homer already makes this understood when he attributes human passions to the gods, and the petty stratagems of politics as well; to the point that sometimes, as in the case of the broken truce, the gods seem worse than man. In fact, the hero is also worse than man. And by that very fact, the god of Olympus is unmistakably human. This model is made for us, and within our range. Charity wins through, since even the gods have need of being loved and pardoned. The great idea of gods wandering the earth announces a new age, and thoughts less ruled by pride. The form of the athlete is already deposed; man recognizes himself by other, less brilliant signs, by signs that must be interpreted and seen through. That is why I say again that Chateaubriand went beyond the pagan sublime, and even the Christian sublime, in what is perhaps the most beautiful passage in the *Martyrs*. To the Christian who has just given his coat to a beggar, the pagan, in his profound wisdom, says: "No doubt you took him for a god." "No," says the Christian, "I took him for a man."

Caesar (Bk. III, Ch. 7)

Caesar is always preoccupied, even on campaign. He has made heroes in his own image; and, without considering courage, Caesar is well aware that a half dozen poltroons could easily cut him down. Caesar sleeps; he is confident; but in fact he is only confident halfway. He bargains with this force that is not himself, and that is never entirely in his hands. He makes believe.

This device of the gods is their great weakness. To make believe is to stand apart from belief. And so he does not pay back the love he is given. His most valuable friends having been reduced to the level of means, he has no friends. All glory arises from equality and lives by equality; the suffrage of honor comes from the honor of suffrage. The peers always worry the king. He would prefer less liberal praises; would be less esteemed, perhaps even despised. From this point of view, the king is never just; he finds it necessary to underrate merit and to be fed on formal offerings; which is vanity, but turned towards very serious ends. This mixture occurs in every king. Majesty corrupts glory by a dissimulation that is part of the job. They believe, but I know. It is thus that every king renounces glory. And the face of the ingenuous hero is soon hidden behind an impenetrable secrecy; like the head of Medusa, petrified and petrifying. Besides, Caesar lives on the dead, and on the most beautiful of the dead. This turns friendship to ice. Even Agamemnon is no longer the mirror of Achilles; or he is a clouded mirror that does not return homage. Hence the detachment, the mysteriousness, the impenetrability of kings, which they pass on to the gods. This inhuman scrutiny makes certain only that it will not be scrutinized. Thus it awakens in those who are closest and most faithful a fear of offending which is a fear of being offended; a fear of examining which is a fear of doubting. This feeling makes for brave subjects, because all they have left is the consolation of obedience, in which they rival each other. But it also creates the desert that surrounds the principal tent. At bottom, power does not want to be loved the way men want to love it. The religion of power is therefore profoundly false, and profoundly sad. Theologians cannot contemplate it without terror, for what they see is a series of evident but impossible propositions. "Whatever you offer to God, God offers to himself." We would like to believe in some metaphysical difficulty; but it is merely a device of intelligence to disguise the ancient lie with philosophy. No matter who the general is, we never offer him what he wants. And devotion, which is dishonored if it is not free, is offensive if it is not forced. Here all the dramas of military politics are gathered together, which history dresses out with incidents. Revolt is contained within obedience; it is in the weapon itself. It is imperative that

the executant die. And because man, at this level of cult, has no other gods than his ancient kings, we understand the way Jupiter looks down upon miserable mortals. It is not that he wants it that way, it is that men want it that way. Achilles destroys himself, and it is the enemy who pays for it; the master waits. It is likely that the fury of men at war comes wholly from this expressionless god, who is worshipped as such.

Tiberius is worse than Caesar, and the court is worse than the camp, whose image it retains. The administration, which ranks and numbers men and things, allows intelligence to rise above strength, to reign by calculation. And the administrative official is even forbidden to commit suicide because of his valuable memory. The accountant thus stands higher than the fighting man, because he stands under him. The heroic world is turned upside-down, and the most vile flatterer wins out over the honest soldier, or the would-be honest soldier, since every subaltern carries lies in his cartridge belt. Thus power is dishonored by an utter disregard for means. The royal guard is made up of thugs; and the Intelligence Service, as it is so accurately and terribly called in the British Empire, is false by the very nature of its work. We sense in this life of empire, willfully blind as it is, that intelligence cannot join with power without maintaining an awesome silence towards others and within itself. The lying astrologer and the buffoon disguised by sincerity are the two friends of Tiberius, and Tiberius wants it known. Thus a mockery of order is established, but nobody laughs. It cannot be made into a god. But the sheer force of the Prince, eternally portrayed by Machiavelli, and always the same through the centuries, raises us little by little towards the Jewish contradiction, Job's dungheap and the sacrifice of Isaac, violent images of the play of arbitrary power.

In the Olympian compromise, the capriciousness of Jupiter is good-natured, always moderated, according to agrarian commemoration, by the affections of his family and the quarreling of Juno. But destiny shows itself occasionally, as that necessity to be king which stands higher than the king himself. Likewise the father, in a real family, is often as hard and pitiless as the object-world; for he is the minister of the object-world; and if the harvest is meagre, he must count out the rations. Ration is reason,

and reason is not tender. But in the case of Jupiter, because of the mixture of the power of war with the power of expediency, destiny is closer to the king and stands in the shadow of his throne. It is there that he retrieves it, after he has let the immortal heroes have their play, after he has played himself, in human fashion, the game of feasting and loving. Destiny tugs at his sleeve, and reminds him that he is not on his throne to amuse himself. On the contrary, he is the slave of his own power. This blind force that he senses behind him, is force itself, whose law, though absolutely external, is the inner law of every king. The most ancient model of the law is an arbitrary decree, made by no one, but which is uttered, *fatum*, like a command. There is a god behind the highest god, as there is a king behind the king. This more than terrifying idea is nonetheless familiar, and always will be, as long as man gains power through Caesar and Caesar through man. For, by the rules of obedience, reason of State cannot be reasonable, and the word of the master cannot be retracted. The spirit fulfills the word, and it is therefore not by chance, but because of the structure of man, that the dialectic reigns over the humiliated spirit. The hero did not want this to happen.

[*Translated by Richard Pevear*]

NANCY CARDOZO

The Witness Angel

Choirs

They listen . . . brows lifted,
Heads tilted, the sensitive
Temples, ears feathered
With silence, the throat
Stems pulsing . . .
Voices we hear before speaking
Accompany us
Along aerial journeys,
Immanent angels,
Words . . . the unspoken.

The Tightrope Angel

The arc of the parasol
Dancing . . . I walk
The perilous balance,
One foot, then the other—
Voyagers.

Catch the trapezes
Gyrating, flung
Over the comets'
Electric bodies—
Seize and let go.

In the sway of the canvas
The peaks and the chasms
Leap. Vertigo
Springs from the silent
Heart of the pole.

Suffer the falling pitch
Of the wire . . . I dance

With my slayer. Many armed
Angel of gravity—
Hold me.

Angel of Intimations

In the garden of the casino
The beggar is waiting, white eyes
Rolled up to a milky sky.

And the hooded women pluck
Shadows out of the trees,
Statues, claw-footed benches.

Revenant landscape—
Who has lifted it out of our sleep
To blaze on the air

A vista . . . ? The evening
Flares through the casino, tossing
Its jewels on the tables.

Below in the harbor, the straining
Engines, ships making ready
For strange embarkations.

When will we depart? The moment
Stroking our eyes with alabaster holds
A garden with figures,

While the one who keeps watch of our dreams,
Tyrannical selfhood approaches
Through alleys of cypress.

Angel of Promontories

Unseen the vast wing trembles
On the height,
Shading the brilliance
Before our eyes.
Blind albatross

Yawning in space,
The storm that beats
Against the brink.

Guardian of precipices
Of no place, yet always
Standing beyond
On terrible rooted feet—
Even the suicide turns back
And crawls
Down the cliff-face
To oblivion.

Angel of Recognitions

You sprang inviolate
To risk your fate, the void
Opening in strangers' eyes.

Gesture subtler than garments
Shaking the light, the swift
Seductive stride.

A look, a coat tossed back
Over the shoulder, touched
You in the hurrying crowd.

As if the faceless angel
Above your city lifted
A mask against the sky,

That burning gaze, demonic
In which you see yourself
Mortal and without fear.

Angel of Possibilities

Struck down, the angel drags metallic feathers
Beside the fountains—pinions

Flailing the columns,
The frozen statues.
There are no more tears out of stone.

A deadly snow descends upon the city.
The outskirts are vanquished—already,
The homeless flee.
A vein has opened. Agony gushes
Through arcades of screams.

The sky has entered the streets, deserted.
It pierces the heart,
As when you died—the possible
And impossible meeting—our hands
Breaking apart.

Angel of Parting

Mornings between the two rivers we greeted—
Behold me, show me your secret face—
Put on fresh clothing for the suns that blazed
Arrivals out of yesterday, the clouds'
White orchards blowing at our window.

The day star bathed our eyes reflecting each other,
Clear water cupped in the palm. Winds
Dove from our hands—we named them
Gulls and swallows, naming ourselves
Salvages of the night.

Where have you taken the morning? Birds of passage—
No longer their arrows play arpeggios on the walls.
Doors swing in space. The windows turn opaque.
Your coat sleeves hang like dead wings. And my mirror
Opens its mouth on solitude.

Absence and pain, my island—I hear the rivers
Grinding their anchors, loosening iron chains.
Downstream the morning drags its empty barges—
How easily you left—a feather blowing,
A withdrawn breath.

*Angel of Sacrifice**for H. B.*

Here is another city, here you may play—
You who were never completed
But told yourself tales of conquests,
An unfinished music of love
And the many ways to die.

I would grow you a supple fur
The pelt of a young animal
And hold you close to the other
Child, inconsolable, gnawing
Its life in my breast.

I would show you my kingdom, the steep
Red-eyed tunnels, caves
Where night-walkers sleep, thieves
Fishing with bloody knives
My underground river.

Dive wingless bird, carolling to the drowned
Sacrifice—sink and strike out
Until on the far shore I see you rise,
Your shoulders bathed in light—
Here is another city, here you may play . . .

*The Witness Angel**I.*

Peach tree, espaliered—remember stars in the boughs
The heft of them bending the trunk to its roots.

How the fruit swelled toward our hands, the ripe
Globes incandescent against the wall.

Lanterns extinguished, the grief of houses crumbling—
Again we built them, shells for a half-life,

Tended our gardens, believing in ancestors
Only to lose them, bull-dozed,

Smothered with rubble, the corn and grasses
Bled into sewers, mowed down by highways,
Animals strung on barbed wire, the bodies
Of children not born. Galaxies dying.

2.

Fruit, white-skinned and rouged—the juice
Poured from our lips, devouring kisses.
Stones pelted the earth, burnt-out meteors
Scattered . . . I was told the pit held a poison.
Once, not caring, I ate the stinging heart
Split from its flesh. And did not perish.
Peach tree, cut down by the wind—remember
The gold and heavy glaze of wasps, the hunger.

3.

Perhaps I ceased unfinished then—my life
Sucked to the roots, night's body swallowing
My bones, the red fruit bleached; light years
Dissolving in my eyes, lost witnesses.
What color is the world . . . ? Peach tree,
Sky deep, lashing stars to earth,
Remember thrusting sap, our thirst, the act—
The moment when we know we are alive.

ROBERT S. CLARK

Berlioz and His Trojans

IN OCTOBER THE METROPOLITAN OPERA presented for the first time Hector Berlioz's *Les Troyens*, probably the house's most important nineteenth-century revival since Rudolf Bing rescued Verdi's great *Don Carlo* from neglect for his first season as general manager in 1950-51. Coincidentally, the Berlioz work is the first new production since Schuyler Chapin was appointed to succeed Bing (leaving out of account the brief stewardship of Goeran Gentele). Like *Don Carlo* for the Bing regime, the choice of *Les Troyens* augurs well for the Chapin years to come, and the likelihood that such auguries will not lead to disappointment, as they did to some extent in the Bing years, is strengthened by a new and important presence in the Met administration: Rafael Kubelik, the house's first musical director in its history, and incidentally a conductor who has been associated with *Les Troyens* for more than thirty years.

Kubelik's name has an honorable part in the gradual rehabilitation of *Les Troyens* after its early woes. Berlioz, despairing of seeing a production of his four-hour, five-act work at the Paris Opéra, accepted an offer from Carvalho, director of the much smaller Théâtre-lyrique in Paris, to stage the Carthaginian scenes alone. For Carvalho he divided the work, separating the first two acts having to do with the fall of Troy from the last three relating the tragic love of Dido and Aeneas. Even so, *Les Troyens à Carthage*, as he called the second part, was subjected to "mutilating" further cuts before and during its run of twenty-one performances in 1863. And all Berlioz ever heard of the first part, *La Prise de Troie*, aside from private performances, was a series of scenes sung in concert by Pauline Viardot-García (Cassandra) and others. It was in this artificially sundered form that the work at first began to find partisans. In 1879, Paris saw a pair of concert performances of *La Prise de Troie*, on the same evening, led by the rival conductor-entrepreneurs Padeloup and Colonne. The two parts were first brought back into close proximity with one another by Felix Mottl, the Austrian Wagnerite conductor, who mounted *La Prise* (in German) at the

opera house in Karlsruhe on December 6, 1890, and followed it the next evening with *Les Troyens à Carthage*. It was Mottl's score that Rafael Kubelik retrieved and used when, as a young conductor in charge of the Czech National Opera Theater in Brno, he staged the second part (in Czech) in 1940. Kubelik's interest in the work was abiding, and in 1957, while he was director of the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, he presented the whole of *Les Troyens*, with only minor cuts, on one evening, but in English. Though there had been previous attempts to present the work on one evening, all had radically shortened it for this purpose. So it was Kubelik's initiative, in the Covent Garden and other performances he conducted in Europe during the 1960's, that led to the first mounting of the work absolutely complete and in French. It took place at Covent Garden on September 17, 1969, Colin Davis conducting, a century after Berlioz's death.

The shift in the fortunes of Berlioz's masterpiece has accompanied a revision in the general attitude toward his music as a whole. The turning point in the latter was the publication of Jacques Barzun's classic biography, *Berlioz and the Romantic Century*, in 1951, but the groundwork had been laid in the twenties and thirties by Barzun's mentor T. S. Wotton, by Sir Thomas Beecham and Sir Hamilton Harty and various others. The prevailing earlier view probably does not need repeating, but briefly put, it pictured Berlioz as a purveyor of gaudy orchestral marvels with a fetish for programs and a fascination with pictorial effects, an interesting eccentric who often masked his weaknesses of form and harmony by designing elephantine works for vast spaces unsuited to the performance of better music. The composer himself was alert to the danger that this part of his complex musical personality might be taken for the whole. He once reproached his friend Heinrich Heine, who had called him a "colossal nightingale, a lark the size of an eagle, such as existed, we are told, in primitive times." "Why," he asked Heine,

did you behave like a critic and let yourself make a categorical statement about an artist when you only know part of his work? You are always thinking of the Witches' Sabbath and the March to the Scaffold from my Fantastic Symphony, and the Dies Irae and Lacrymosa from my Requiem. Yet I think I have done and can do things that are quite different.

He had and could, and now most acknowledge it is so.

Some portion of the older view of Berlioz stems from the fact that *Les Troyens*, the opéra-comique *Beatrice and Benedict*, and the oratorio *L'Enfance du Christ*, works that do not fit the former misconception, remained unknown or little known until the Berlioz revivals of the past forty or fifty years. So even when the *Symphonie fantastique* was not taken as representative, it was easy to misconstrue Berlioz. A brief entry in the "Everyman Encyclopedia" for 1913, for example, does not mention *Les Troyens*, and calls *The Damnation of Faust* his greatest work. Now *The Damnation* has passages of great beauty and imaginative power, but it suffers from unshapeliness—the result of Berlioz's determination to incorporate his *Eight Scenes from Faust*, written sixteen years earlier, wholesale into its structure—and from some rather uninspired music. *Les Troyens* is clearly superior: its scope is large but its proportions are just; it is charged with passion and grandeur, but never only willful or grandiose.

When Berlioz first began, in the 1850's, to consider a work based upon Virgil's *Aeneid*, he knew that its chances of finding official and public favor were slim. In the Paris of that time, a composer's status hung on one thing, just as it had for the thirty years previous: a success at the Opéra. Berlioz had not had one. *Benvenuto Cellini*, his only opera before *Troyens*, had been accepted reluctantly by the Opéra management (1838) and had proven a failure. Furthermore, Berlioz had been the music critic of the *Journal des débats* since 1835, and the Opéra had often been the target of his mordant wit, his disdain for mediocrity, and his impatience with bureaucratic humbug. After the accession of Louis Napoleon, in 1848 to the Presidency of France and four years later to the Imperial throne, Berlioz's position was further weakened because the Bertin family, owners of the *Journal des débats* and formerly his patrons, were Orléanists. No one in the Emperor's circle was likely to take up the cudgels for Berlioz, and few of them cared what went on at the Opéra in any case: like the Emperor himself, they preferred Offenbach at the Opéra-comique. So the idols of the Opéra of twenty years' standing—Meyerbeer, Halévy, Auber, and a host of lesser composers—remained firmly in place. Moreover, among the Parisian intellectuals, who had heretofore given Berlioz some comfort, the cult of Wagner was growing: by the mid-1850's

Wagner had completed *Das Rheingold*, *Die Walküre*, and a portion of *Siegfried*, and had found French support for the theories set forth in *The Artwork of the Future* (1850) and *Opera and Drama* (1850-51), theories with which Berlioz had little sympathy.

But the composition of *Les Troyens* was impelled more by inner drives than by hopes of acclaim or gain (though these motives were not absent, as Berlioz frankly admits in his Memoirs and letters). Perhaps it was the death of his father in 1848, when Berlioz was forty-five, that began the unconscious gestation of the work. His father, a provincial physician of some means, had been largely responsible for Berlioz's education, and it was while learning Latin from Dr. Berlioz that, at the age of twelve, he discovered Virgil, "who first found the way to my heart and opened my budding imagination, by speaking to me of epic passions for which instinct had prepared me." He recalled in his Memoirs the nostalgia and emotional turmoil loosed in him by his return to his birthplace to console his sisters after his father's sudden death. On this visit began his attempt, successful only many years later, to find once more his first love, Estelle Duboeuf, his "*stella montis*." The source of the change in his composing style, the tipping of the scale from the Dionysian to the Apollonian side, and so ultimately the wellsprings of *Les Troyens*, are to be found in these years and these experiences.

Berlioz himself traces the first stirring to 1851. "For the last three years," he wrote in 1854, "I have been tormented by the idea for a vast opera, for which I would write the words and the music . . . I am resisting the temptation to carry out this project, and shall, I trust, resist to the end." Later he tells of visiting Franz Liszt, then conductor of the court theater at Weimar, and his mistress the bluestocking Princess Carolyne Sayn-Wittgenstein. "[In 1855], while talking with the Princess,"

. . . I was drawn on to speak of my admiration for Virgil and the idea I had conceived of a vast opera on the Shakespearean plan, based on the second and fourth books of the *Aeneid*. I added that I knew too well the miseries such an underaking must bring me, ever to attempt it. "But," replied the Princess, "your passion for Shakespeare combined with this love of classical antiquity would be sure to produce something new and splendid. Come, you must write this opera, this lyric poem or whatever you like

to call it. You must tackle it and you must finish it." I continued to make objections. "Listen," she said, "if you shrink from the difficulties this work may and must bring you, if you are so feeble as to be afraid to face everything for Dido and Cassandra, then never come back here—I refuse to see you again." Milder words than these would have been enough to decide me.

He began work on the poem early in 1856, and by late June had finished the fourth act. "I resist the blandishments that music exerts to have me attend to her," he wrote to the Princess. "I want to finish everything before I begin the score. Yet last week I could not help composing the Shakespearean duet: 'In such a night as this/When the sweet wind did gently kiss the trees, etc.' So the music of this litany of love is done." The Shakespeare lines are, of course, from *The Merchant of Venice*—"stolen and Virgilianized," as he told his sister. In midsummer he sent the poem to the Princess for her critique, and when he could free himself from other tasks—he had just been elected a member of the French Academy, and there were prize committees, concerts, and so forth—he worked at composing. *Les Troyens* was completed, he tells us in the Memoirs, late in 1859, "at the end of three and a half years of corrections, alterations, polishing and repolishing. . . ." "Whatever its fate," he wrote to the Princess, "I am perfectly happy to have undertaken and finished it." Throughout the period of composition Berlioz had given readings of the poem in Paris, hoping to generate enough enthusiasm to carry the finished work to the Opéra stage, for it alone could meet the requirements of the work's stagecraft. These efforts were unavailing, and so were direct pleas to both the Emperor and the Empress. Finally Berlioz was forced to accept Carvalho's invitation.

Les Troyens, in the words of the prominent historian of opera Donald Jay Grout, "is the unique opera in which the epic has been successfully dramatized." In his libretto Berlioz drew upon the *Aeneid* for the outlines and many of the details of the legend: the wooden horse, the fall of Troy, Aeneas' rescue of Priam's treasure and his flight, Cassandra's death, the Trojan warriors' landing at Carthage and repulsion of the attacking Iarbas and his band, the consummation of Dido's and Aeneas' love in a cave during a storm (the orchestral episode called "Royal Hunt and Storm," well known as a concert piece), the departure of the Trojans for Italy, and Dido's suicide. Ber-

lioz shaped these events into a sweeping arch: the first two acts, set in Troy, are dominated by the clash of arms, the third and fourth by the serenity and longing of the Queen of Carthage's love for Aeneas, and the final act by the terror and despair of Aeneas' abandonment of her and the violence of her suicide. These opposing moods create a kind of extended A-B-A form. *Les Troyens* is inevitably compared to Wagner's *Ring* cycle, but the two have almost nothing in common but a general largeness of scope. Berlioz's dramatic method differs from Wagner's in two important ways. In the *Ring*, Wagner employs a continuous narrative in which events are linked in a musical sequence that obliterates the boundaries of such smaller forms as are used. Berlioz's building blocks, on the other hand, were the closed forms of conventional French grand opera: aria, duet, quintet, septet, chorus, march, ballet. He linked them with passages of accompanied recitative that respected their boundaries, and organized them into "tableaux," pivotal scenes whose concentrated action and passion made fertile soil for lyrical exposition. As Jacques Barzun puts it, "*Les Troyens* seeks to impart neither metaphysics nor the details of a legend, but only its psychological and emotional substance." In another way it differs markedly from the *Ring*: the composer characterizes it as having "imposing grandeur and an extreme variety of moods." The *Ring* certainly has the former, but not the latter. Berlioz achieved variety by studding the martial and heroic progress of the myth with contrasting touches: in Act One, the pantomime of Andromache and her son Astyanax paying tribute to Priam, accompanied by a mournful clarinet melody that is among the most beautiful Berlioz ever wrote; at the opening of Act Two, the appearance of Hector's shade to Aeneas before the warrior rushes off to seize Priam's treasure; in Act Four, the device of the orchestral "Royal Hunt and Storm" to depict the fulfillment of Dido and Aeneas' love, and, later, Iopas' homely song to soothe the queen; and in the final act, the nostalgic song of the Trojan sailor Hylas, and the duet of the grumbling Trojan sentries before their departure. Only something like the "Royal Hunt and Storm" is conceivable in Wagner. Furthermore, the caressing, sensuous mood of the end of the fourth act, the moonlit scene beginning with the septet and continuing with the Shakespearean "litany of love" intoned in the duet "*Nuit*

d'ivresse et d'extase infinie," is unknown in classical epic and Teutonic legend alike. The use of contrast to heighten dramatic impact is Berlioz's debt to Shakespeare, and he acknowledged it: about the sentries' duet he wrote in the autograph of the score that such a mixture of genres was found objectionable in some circles, as if "*Don Giovanni* were not an admirable example of the good effect such a mixture produces . . . and as if Shakespeare did not exist."

What finally sets him apart from Wagner is that Berlioz was unafraid to make music the heart of the matter, and to let posterity judge *Les Troyens* on its musical merits without interposing theory and propaganda between it and the audience. He wrote to the Princess of "Wagner's crime: he wants to dethrone music and reduce it to expressive *accents*. . . . Music is so powerful that in given instances it can conquer alone, and it has a thousand times earned the right to say with Medea: 'Myself, which is enough.'" It is enough in *Les Troyens*. All of Berlioz's characteristic strengths flower here: large effects created by simple means, of which the opening measures of the opera, for chorus and orchestra, are as good an example as any; a lively sense of rhythmic motion that obviates monotony but seldom seems merely quirky, heard at its best in the "Royal Hunt and Storm"; the wonderfully adept handling of the chorus, of which the Carthaginians' "*Gloire, gloire à Didon*" is an instance; and the employment of a large orchestra in ways that enhance, rather than obtrude upon, the "truthfulness of expression" the composer thought marked the work, ways that are apparent almost anywhere one chooses to look. The underpinning of the whole musical edifice is melody. It is worth quoting in full Berlioz's own defense of his melodic style, in a letter of 1858 to a would-be biographer, reproduced in the *Memoirs*:

I have never dreamed of writing music "without melody," as people in France have absurdly maintained. Such a school now exists in Germany and I abominate it. It should not be difficult to recognize that although I may not actually confine myself to taking a short subject for the theme of a movement, as the greatest masters often did, I am always careful to make my compositions abundantly melodic. The value of these melodies, their distinction, originality, and charm, may well be contested; it is not for me to estimate it. But to deny their existence is, I submit, dishonest or simply silly. Only, as they are often on a very large

scale, a shallow, undeveloped sensibility is slow to grasp their form. They may also be combined with other subsidiary melodies which, for these same weak spirits, obscure their outline.

Such large-scale melodies are the foundation of *Les Troyens*' style, and a listener's response to the opera will be determined by his response to them.

It goes without saying that the rather stately dramatic movement of this work does not find immediate sympathy with those accustomed to the rapidity and directness of late Verdi and *verismo*. It may likewise seem artificial and conventional to those who see Wagnerian continuity as the most telling way to achieve dramatic flow and climax. No one, of course, can blame Mozart or Bellini—or Berlioz—for not writing like Wagner and Verdi. But the Berlioz case is different: if *Les Troyens* had been heard whole by a perceptive audience in Berlioz's time, it would probably have been judged a textbook of progressive tendencies in the operatic art, a synthesis of French grand opera, the German instrumental school's orchestral innovations, and the best of the reforms and "advances" of Spontini, Gluck, and Mozart. It might even have been dubbed "the music of the future." But it was the summation and perfection of tendencies that were about to be undercut by other artistic fashions and by social and economic forces—nationalism and republicanism, the rise of Germany—that would shake European society and all its institutions. Berlioz's historical moment passed just as he grasped at it, and just as the Romantic movement seemed to be in the ascendant (by the mid-Fifties all three of the avatars of French Romanticism, Hugo, Delacroix, and Berlioz, were members of the French Academy). But by itself this irony is too simple. By the time the Romantics were at last victorious, Berlioz had become something else, or something more. *Les Troyens* illustrates the paradox that Gerald Abraham puts so well:

that when the Romantic movement had conquered the whole world of music in the nineteenth century, the only important composer who went on composing serenely beautiful music, filled with the classical spirit and fulfilling the classical idea, was he who a quarter of a century earlier had been considered the most extravagant of the romantics.

In my next chronicle, I shall report on the details of the Metropolitan's production.

DANIEL HOFFMAN

After God

The Jews have a Fancy, that when our Almighty Creator befangled the Heavens with the *Stars of Night*, He left a Space near the Northern Pole, unfurnished and unfurnished, that if any *After-God* should lay claim to Deity, a challenge to fill up that fpace might Eternally confute it.

—Cotton Mather

Who keeps His ceaselessly attentive eye
Upon the flight and fall
Of each Polaris through the wide feast-hall
Of the sky,
So like the life of man from dark
To dark in a little space,

Who in this bowling alley spins
Balls of light
At the back of the North Wind
Careening as their plastic skins
Mirror widdershins
Our sponsored images,

Who flings bright strands of platinum hair
And unpointed needles wandering
Through the frozen stratosphere
In a confusion
Of jagged rays
Until True North is lost,

Who deafens the Aurora Borealis
With climbing fire,
Who spurts with the desire
That blazes and subsides in ashen
Droppings of contagion
After the whirlwind,

Him we beseech
As adepts who would scan and preach
The Providences of His will.
Be done, send us a sign
That we may read
By the shrivelled light of our gelded sun
The sentence of our sufferings.
His blood flames now
Against the Northern sky,
He walks among us, visible.
The next dawn brings
A vacant hour that sacrifice can fill.

North

For reasons of their own the red-winged blackbirds
Have gathered in a cloud. They fall like snow.
The skies, the trees, the fields are black with blackbirds,
Black with the pandemonium of their cries.
The only place more desolate than this one
Is this, when the last straggling birds have flown.

East

Always the mysterious
Promise of a new day.
This is the place
Of birth, the distant home
Of the future
God. Until he come

There is no entrance
There. What awaits us we
Can know only
By our deliverance.

South

Here you hoard the green
Hieroglyphs of morning
All the baffled afternoon

West

This is the home of the setting sun
Of the past
Of the long procession
Of the dead.

You can journey toward it forever
Without arriving.
Each of your footsteps enlarges behind you
The lost land you seek.

JOHN HOLLANDER

The Muse in the Roman Tower

Via dei Portoghesi

(for James Wright)

American girl, within
Your room up in the tower
Above darkening houses
That squat along darkened streets,
Come to your window—or his,
Because it eyes his wider
One which frames it in sunset—

Peer like a kind of day out
Of one region into all
Others, lighting up even
The farrowing street at noon
With what comes out of the dark.
Now while all the visible
Angels rest their stone trumpets

In the hot light, Olive, for
Instance, recollects her brood
Of cloudy doves, passengers
For ages beyond our own:
Ripe-eyed, she keeps all the rest,
But what will come will never
Come of the peaceable hours;

Thus Myrtle, perhaps, our old
Dear substrate, mincing to what
One might dare call her casement,
Would beam admittance to her
Shady bed and a hot fuck
Under the *tramontana*:
What was to come would cool;

And even Laura, cooler
Than the darkest greens of her

Northwest, waiting for evening
As long as if for ever,
Aureate hair catching a
Brightness from beyond her own,
Leaping from the wider day:

No, that lady will not be
Whistled for, and the comic
Lauro from downstairs, poking
Out of his hole in the wall
Shouting for Massimo, comes
Justly rebuking the wrong
Call directed far too high.

You there who are left, Judith
Or Joan or whoever dwells
In the magic tower now,
Gaze across with eyes of sky
Into the shadowed room where
He waits for what will come and
Seize him as if with your light.

JOHN TAGLIABUE

Sound Advice to the Self

I wanted to make a musical instrument
I looked at a pear

I wanted to make a musical score
I looked at a pair of lovers

I wanted to make many kinds of music
I thought of many countries, saints, lovers, fruit, flowers, etc.

I wanted to be music
so I love you

Bonnard and Rainbows Assisting Providence

A jar of honey
glowing on the breakfast table

a woman nearby waking up

tangerines on the table
and sunlight

nearby memories of Debussy
Monet and Impressionism

the smell of coffee
the sound of light

the sound of a woman
drying herself after
a leisurely bath

vagueness
colors then more radiance
and warmth

the sun told the bees
the bees told the honey

the mild woman in her
soft robe of colors
appeared

the gentleman with the beard
was pleased.

Monet Snoring

The discursive sun seeping into the sun flower
images like angels descending to sleeping people
rivers like prophets noticing slow moving clouds
raindrops like assistants joining the music of rivers

CHARLES W. MILLARD

Winslow Homer

WINSLOW HOMER'S ARTISTIC CAREER began as that of a graphic artist, and by the early 1860's he was perhaps the most prominent of *Harper's Weekly's* visual reporters of the Civil War. The fact that he spent his early years preparing wood engravings encouraged in Homer certain stylistic and compositional traits which were to persist throughout his life. These included conceiving compositions in broad tonal, rather than linear, patterns and placing one or more figures close to the picture surface not simply to serve as repoussoirs but to give immediacy to scenes of contemporary life. The general interest in contemporaneity also encouraged by his newspaper work stayed with Homer, and from Civil War soldiers in action or in camp he moved on to scenes of vacationers at beach resorts and mountain campers during the 1870's. Among the most surprising of his woodblock images of these years is *Homeward-bound*, which appeared in *Harper's Weekly* in December 1867. The powerful recessive lines of the ship's deck are unusual for Homer and he



Homeward Bound

Engraving

(Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston;
Gift of Edward J. Holmes)

manages not only to block them twice—once with the group of figures in the right foreground and once with the wall of the sea behind—but to use the ship's masts, funnel, and rigging to create a pattern in the upper part of the composition that counters pictorially the represented thrust of the deck. Similarly, the ship's list not only conveys an objective fact but is used to alter normal compositional relationships so as to emphasize pictorial pattern. At this early stage of his career, however, Homer was not always so daring, and other of his images, such as *A Bivouac Fire on the Potomac* with its curved upper corners and circular group of figures, exhibit a more conventional, not to say theatrical, use of elements. Homer's search for style and subject-matter, through which he developed the devices that persisted in his work, is also clearly apparent in his early oils. *The Initials* of 1864, a girl carving her initials in a forest tree, represents the anecdotal, weaker side of Homer's art, recalling some of the less subtle examples of English mid-Victorian narrative painting. His Civil War scenes, on the other hand, tend toward greater reserve in spite of the dramatic possibilities of their themes. One senses that in the face of actual drama Homer tried to be as astringent as possible, allowing himself the luxury of nostalgia only with more invented, less reportorial, subjects. Indeed, one is tempted to suggest that Homer dealt with conflict and mortality by objectifying and mastering it in his art, imparting to his paintings of such subjects a power often lacking in his other work. Only occasionally do the lines cross, as in *Home Sweet Home*, a composition in which two soldiers are seen outside their tents as a band plays the eponymous song in the background.

Homer's paint application during the 1860's and early '70's was always meticulous, his colors running to patches of blue and red seen against brownish grounds, all inflected so as to give the necessary tonal variety and unity. Horizons tended to be high, sometimes nonexistent, pushing compositions toward the surface of the picture, and already Homer was fond of the extended horizontal format that reappears throughout his work, distending the pictorial moment. Space was most often recessive in parallel planes or diagonals, not opening out directly into distant vistas, another device that brings Homer's compositions forward and may suggest what he learned from flat, graphic

effects. Also derived from such effects are occasional cropped elements, such as the disembodied head that pops out of the tent in *The Bright Side*, and Homer's debt to photography is no doubt evidenced in the broad light skies against which his equally broad dark foregrounds are played off. Few pictures are so wholly characteristic of this early period as *Milking Time* of 1875. The cropped board fence not only establishes the rectangular format, it flattens the composition against the picture plane, divides the light upper quarter of the composition from the dark lower part, and interrupts the landscape and animals represented beyond it so as to make them into almost abstract elements. The unclear relationships of the figures to each other and to the action of the picture is a psychological anomaly characteristic of Homer, one most clearly seen during this period in *Dad's Coming* with its iconic disjunction between the mother and her two children. It seems to have been an effort on Homer's part to rectify the too-anecdotal quality of some of his work and to make his figures as impersonal as nature itself. It may even have been a conscious effort to pull away from his obvious

*Milking Time*

(The Wilmington Society of the Fine Arts)

and nostalgic attraction to halcyon subjects, particularly children or mothers and children seen in natural settings, or may evidence an increasing awareness of life's ambiguities on Homer's part and a search for profounder meanings, both vital and pictorial.

Toward the end of the 1860's there appeared in Homer's work several unusual pictures that raise the interesting issue of his relationship to contemporary French, and specifically Impressionist, painting. These blond, high-valued works include *The Bridle Path*, *White Mountains* of 1868 and *Long Branch* of 1869. Suffused with light, they seem at first to be not only tentatives toward tonal integrity but definite responses to what Homer may have seen in Paris in 1866-67. Curiously, *Croquet Scene* of 1866, painted before his trip, is already an extremely Impressionist picture, although certainly its plein-air and momentary character owe more to Homer's experience as a pictorial journalist than to any knowledge of early Impressionism. *The Nurse* of 1867, on the other hand, its figure half-cropped, her head turned in profile against a parasol, may well represent something of what Homer assimilated in France. As one considers these pictures, however, apparent references to contemporary artistic movements and events increasingly seem to be fortuitous and Homer appears as a psychological pilgrim whose art, the record of his pilgrimage, reflects not so much his awareness of the artistic mainstream as the growth and modernization of his personality. The fact that similar modernization was going on elsewhere seems to be of no great relevance to Homer; indeed, to accomplish his pilgrimage within himself, he felt it increasingly necessary to retreat from the world. Paradoxically, as he did so, his art appeared more international, more "influenced." All of which is not to say that Homer developed in a vacuum—far from it—but that his response to the world around him was shaped by deeply-felt inner necessity, by a struggle with himself and with the facts of his own existence. What the artistic world had to offer took second place to that necessity.

In the last half of the 1870's the nostalgic side of Homer's art took a new turn in pictures of fashionably dressed young ladies in outdoor settings, pictures with such titles as *The Trying Place*. At the same time he continued his paintings of youth, among the best of which is *Breezing Up*. The charming



The Two Guides Oil/canvas, 24 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 38 $\frac{1}{4}$ " (Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.)

and conventional subject matter of this picture—a man and three boys out sailing—somewhat obscures the daring of its composition, the eccentrically—placed boat sailing rapidly out of the composition to the left, its sails and mast cropped by the edge of the canvas. Perhaps the most telling picture of these years is *The Two Guides* of 1876, the year Homer turned forty. Two mountain guides, an old bearded one and a young one holding an axe, gaze obliquely out of the canvas, the older of the two pointing to something in the distance. One is tempted to think that the older man points out a road to be followed to the younger and that both gaze toward an uncertain future. Be that as it may, the picture is certainly prophetic in its technique, for one begins to see in it a loosening up of Homer's paint application, not only in the background but in the more detailed foreground, and a growing homogeneity of tonality. Although there is still a clear division between light sky and darker land, the contrasts are not as great as formerly, and the distant blue mountains mediate in tonality between the sky and the immediate foreground. Moreover, the red accents are limited to the shirt of the young guide and a few small touches in the leaves, while the accustomed blue accents are blended with the usual green

of the landscape to produce an overall soft, grayed blue-green. Finally, the planar recession of space is emphasized by elimination of the middleground, the foreground hill being seen directly against the background mountain across what one imagines to be a sharp declivity. In every way, *The Two Guides* seems a pivotal picture and, indeed, it sums up what had passed in Homer's painting and suggests what was to come.

During the 1880's Homer's style rapidly solidified into the broad and unified instrument toward which he had been moving. Homer worked a great deal in watercolor, a medium he had always liked, during these years, and the breadth and softness of the wash seems to have reinforced developments in his oil painting. Grayed hues became much more prominent, color accents softer, and sunlit scenes were all but abandoned for backlighting or a cloudy, suffused light, adding to the effect of tonal unification. The brilliantly sunlit watercolors Homer began painting on his trips to the Caribbean seldom contradict this tendency, since they are uniformly highkeyed and do not deal in chiaroscuro. Homer's figures become monumental, marmoreal, particularly his women standing like fates on rocky coasts in groups of two or three. They seem no longer to be in nature but of it, their clothing no longer specific of occupation or social standing, their activities uncertain or directly related to the sea that now dominates Homer's thoughts. Nature, so long benign or autumnal in Homer's work, now turns powerful and deadly, and there appear the first of a long series of scenes of man's struggle against the sea—*The Wreck of the Iron Crown* in 1881, *Lost on the Grand Banks* in 1885-1886, etc. Formally, the sea scenes do away with normal perspective and distinctions between foreground and background. All is caught up in an infinity of gray-green, sky and sea spreading together into a natural unity in which man is caught up powerlessly. *A Swell of the Ocean* of 1883, prophetic of *Kissing the Moon* of twenty years later, demonstrates how far Homer was willing to push this tendency, as well as how daring his formal means could become. Borne by an all but invisible boat the mariner is trapped between sea and sky, his upper body used as human accent in an otherwise almost abstract wash of color. The most startling picture of these years is probably *Under-tow* of 1886. Arranged frieze-like across the composition four



Undertow Oil/canvas, 29 $\frac{13}{16}$ x 47 $\frac{5}{8}$ "

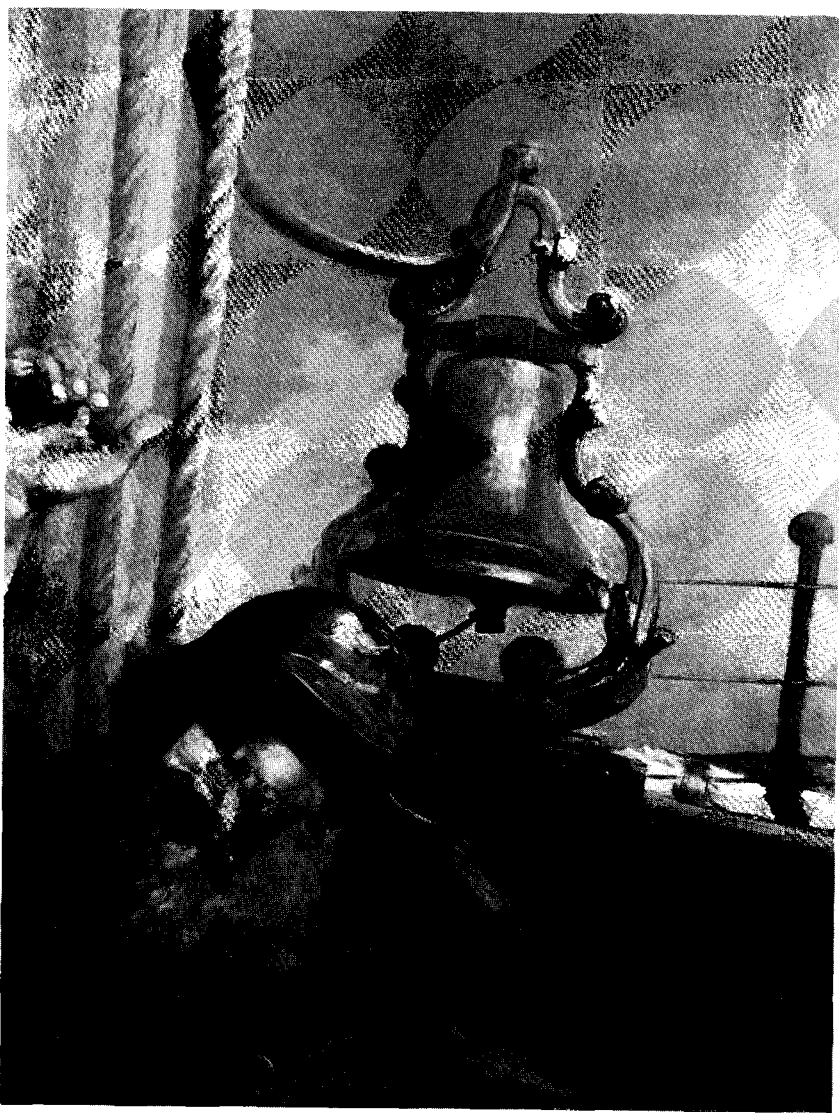
(Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Mass.)

figures are juxtaposed with strange and theatrical gestures, looking neither at each other nor at the spectator. The sea against which they struggle dominates almost the entire background, rising up to flatten represented space and threatening to spill both itself and the figures out of the canvas. A small segment of stormy sky glowers toward the top of the picture. In few of his other works are Homer's figures as sculptural as these or as obviously a part of that against which they struggle. Here, also, one sees the extreme flattening of the figures, both human and animal, which Homer played off against his atmospheric backgrounds.

During the ten years that separated *Undertow* from *All's Well* Homer turned out a vast number of watercolors, largely in the Caribbean during the winter and the Adirondacks in the summer. Increasingly, he cropped his compositions so as to give only significant details (*A "Norther," Key West*), came close to his subjects, eliminating as much context as possible (*Florida Palms*), and used his watercolor with such fluidity that his compositions are all but abstract (*The Rapids, Hudson River, Adirondacks*). In *Adirondack Guide* of 1894 all three of these tendencies are combined, as the massive trees in the background disappear quickly out of the composition, the guide and his

boat are placed flat against the foreground, and the loose washes of the entire picture dissolve form in their liquid color patterns.

In 1896 Homer painted *The Lookout*—"All's Well," a picture which announces almost all the major problems that were to occupy him for the last fourteen years of his life. Among the most serene of his works, it is executed in a close-valued Whistlerian blue-green used to wholly non-Whistlerian effect. This carefully modulated atmospheric color scheme relieves what would otherwise be an unbearable forward pressure of pictorial elements. The monumentalized human elements—a disjunctive hand and head separated by the lower left corner of the canvas—are squeezed between the surface of the canvas and the bell and its mounting immediately behind, while the few visible fragments of the ship's anatomy—mast, rigging, and rail—are used to modulate between man and bell and between bell and distant sea. In their slight disalignment and the abstract pictorial functions they serve, the latter are, thus, distant and distilled descendants of the ship's rigging in *Homeward-bound* of thirty years earlier, imbued with new austerity and force. Homer's usual dark foreground and light background are here integrated into almost a single tonal area, and the entire composition is sparked with a few touches of white derived, as was Homer's wont, from the representation of sea-foam. All in all, the picture is a *summa* of his late style. Flattened forms, cutoff shapes, often monumentalized, and a somber blue, blue-gray, or violet color range livened with white were the hallmarks of that style. Color, while never losing its descriptive function—never wholly ceasing to be local color—tends to define areas of the picture rather than represented objects. All of this is supremely apparent in the watercolor *Rum Cay*, in which the curiously-posed figures of man and tortoise are set off against three horizontal color bands standing for sand, sea, and sky. In *Kissing the Moon* of 1904, the horizontal areas are reduced to two, the lower interrupted by the startling introduction of the heads and shoulders of three men. Flattened by the composition, engulfed by the sea, the three communicate neither with each other nor with the beholder. This anonymity pervades all of Homer's late pictures, in which human figures are either dwarfed or omitted altogether. Nature, first benign and then an equal



The Lookout—"All's Well" Oil/canvas, 40 x 30 1/4" (Courtesy Museum of Fine Arts, Boston; William Wilkins Warren Fund)

antagonist, finally becomes victor, and in the well-known *Gulf Stream* a man floats adrift and prey to windspouts, sharks, and the hostile sea. In some pictures, such as *Cannon Rock* and *On a Lee Shore*, even the beholder is threatened by the sea. In a curious perspective reversal, rocks are arranged diagonally at

the lower corners of these canvases to funnel the breaking waves out of the picture. This aggressive tendency reaches its climax in *Right and Left*, 1909, in which the beholder seems in the immediate line of fire of the hunters whose distant guns have just felled the ducks dropping dead to the sea while simultaneously seeming to want to fly on out of the painting. In these pictorially daring and highly abstract late pictures Homer seems to have come to grips not only with extremely difficult artistic issues and with the natural forces toward which he constantly retreated, but with himself. Few bodies of work are as autobiographical a record of the maturation of a man as is that of Homer. In some curious way, while retreating ever more into himself, while forging the chains that bound his work to his personality and to his immediate surroundings—Maine and the Caribbean—Homer arrived at a subtle and painterly style that was far more sophisticated—far more French, one wants to say—than the one he had used when he was more widely travelled. In these various respects he recalls Cézanne and Degas. The comparisons are purely spiritual, however, for Homer's art was first and last American, transforming an inspired provincialism into a broad, flexible instrument that came to grips with issues of importance far beyond the time and place in which it was conceived.



Right and Left

Oil/canvas, 28 $\frac{1}{4}$ x 48 $\frac{3}{8}$ "

(National Gallery of Art,
Washington, D.C.; Gift of the Avalon Foundation)

PHILIP BOOTH

Peru

Not fog but cloud
gusts onto the mule walled in
with one thin tree
in this stone farmyard.

The tree bends like an Inca's longbow:
the wind is climbing the side of the Andes.

The mule lies folded against the old wind,
his ears peaked like
the small thatched mountain that comes
and goes
through the cloud: a stone barn
held together by mud. Thatch, mud, stone;
the mule knows how they feel.

He almost sleeps, almost content: miles
behind his eyes, at rest for this moment
against the tall winds of Peru, he
dreams the perfect burden of granite,

granite his ancestors carried,
hundreds of years ahead
of him, up
from Pisac, to form
in Machu Picchu the white steps built to
the highest shrine: the *hitching-
post-of-the-sun*.

Down steep generations,
thatch, mud, stone, hold their own like
white granite. Under the wind-
struck cloud of a darker solstice,
his eyes closed on winter, the mule
does not need to look. His blood believes.
He can already hear the sun come
galloping back.

GRACE SCHULMAN

Metamorphosis

I See me in the glaze
On a leaf, in the skin's
Iridescence, have me in luminous
Reveries; light turns into me.
I preside the sea: waves harness
My force. I am lightning
Flashing; I am the lair
Of all change that is life.
My road is various; an alternating blaze;
I generate and destroy,
Feed what I devour,
Burning on air.

II Roaring in the night for thousands of miles
I do not sing with flames.
I, too, change—into swirling clouds, into vapor;
Winds send foam rolling over me,
Sheets of marble in my wake.
Life begins and ends here: large with rain,
I hold generations.
I break through rock, pour over sand,
Flow below ice, above tides,
Thunder under lightning,
Juggle blades in air;
I crash myself out in phosphorescent spray whispering
I shall be there when waves pass by.

III Forced up by earth,
Cracked by ice,
I am the mountains and the valleys.
Even the wind will age in me.
I fall for centuries before I shine,
A meteor—a slow dream coming in.

COLETTE INEZ

Tunnel, Funnel, Perpendicular, Blue...

Morf. The dog barks.
Form for the poem.
Meop, the cat.
Listen to the apertures.
Look for the throat that shapes the bark,
the mouth of the cat.

Anything, therefore, is form
emerging from that which informs.
And uniforms:
an usherette in the theater of signs,
an Argentine pilot plotting the stars.

Stars form. Blue young, red old,
go out dwarfed in the inverse dark
astronomers seek seeking form.
Morf. Morpheus. Sleep has shape:

tunnel, funnel, perpendicular, blue
foldout map that continues to blur
under the glass of a witnessing mind.
Breakneck turns. A cur, occur.
Form determines the speed of turn.
Depths of return

continue to blur what precision occurs
when the pump erodes and no blood climbs,
condemned to its fact as the brainstem pales
like a blasted stalk, and the brain won't bloom.

Obedience bows to formula's rule,
to its chemical investiture
and what we call silence has the noise of a shell
informing our ears with the sea of itself.

Not wordless dogs. Listen to the harnesses.
Look for the hand that shapes the whip,
the arch, the crucifix
in a mastery of form.

Reviews

ROGER SALE

The States of Criticism¹

CALVIN BEDIENT, TO USE THE MOST damning accurate phrase, is a young American academic. He also is the author of "*Middlemarch: Touching Down*" (THE HUDSON REVIEW, Spring, 1969), which is as good an evocation of that novel's greatness as I have read in a long time. The general demeanor of his first book, *Architects of the Self*, is so energetic, so pleasantly insistent, that the label "young American academic" begins to seem only technically true. We do not expect to find prose like this issuing from our university presses:

So it was that, having made pity illogical, a mere indulgence, having reduced mystery to science, and having exchanged the metaphysical inevitability of the Greeks for the round of her own psychological needs, George Eliot failed, failed utterly, to write the tragedy that she held to be implicit in the enduring conditions of human life.

or:

There is an utterness, then, both in the findings and in the procedure of *Middlemarch*. And it is this that gives the book its pre-eminence among English novels. Beside it, the rest of English fiction appears—fictitious. And this is true even of novels that also bear *Quixote* with them: by comparison *Great Expectations*, for instance, is half fairy tale, and *Vanity Fair* a spree of humor and style.

Style is not a stance to Bedient, but the air he breathes; having realized he is not stiff or jargon-ridden, he does not attempt to assure us of his authenticity by flip-flopping into aggressive, with-it prose. He never seems interested in making his writing self-protective, so he is bound to be more interesting to read than all but a few American academics.

But look at the two quotations again. The second is a strong attempt to praise a book we all wish we knew better how to praise, but the first is close to guff, a reduction of George Eliot to a taker of positions, a hawker of moral ideas, a failed didactic, and the second quotation is almost enough by itself to show this. For if it is true that beside *Middlemarch* the rest of English fiction appears—fictitious,

¹ ARCHITECTS OF THE SELF, by Calvin Bedient. University of California. \$7.50. THE TURN OF A CENTURY, by Bernard Bergonzi. Barnes & Noble. \$13.50. THOMAS HARDY AND BRITISH POETRY, by Donald Davie. Oxford. \$6.95. THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY, by Raymond Williams. Oxford. \$9.75.

then it matters little if in some statement or other, some part of her temperament, George Eliot "made pity illogical, a mere indulgence" or seemed to "reduce mystery to science," because in crucial ways she did nothing of the sort. The Reverend Mr. Casaubon shows by himself that one of the great unscientific mysteries of English fiction is the power of his creator's pity for him.

Bedient's book is a revision of his Ph.D. thesis, and most of what is wrong is simply the result of its not having been revised enough; Bedient is fine, but the thesis of *Architects of the Self* is all wrong. The architects are, beside George Eliot, D. H. Lawrence and E. M. Forster: "these are the supreme creative consciences . . . in English fiction." The presence of Forster next to George Eliot and Lawrence is, for me at least, almost enough to take the breath away. Sadder still, all we are really asked to do is believe once more in the received clichés, George Eliot set up as "the supreme moralist of the Victorian ethos," Lawrence as "her zealous opposite," and Forster as taker of "something of a median position." Anything is stressed that leads George Eliot to preach duty and the subservience of the individual self, or that leads Lawrence to shriek for vital selves, and yes, oh dear me yes, there is Forster, dragged in as one Lawrentian in spirit who maintained some care of society. It is a brutal conception, deeply and wrongly reductive.

But, as if realizing this in the years since he conceived it, Bedient gives us the wonderful essay on *Middlemarch*, even if it seems offered as the high unaccountable exception to George Eliot's usual practice. We also get a treatment of *Daniel Deronda* that at least begins to get at some of that novel's peculiar and stunning power, though we hear no word of Klesmer or the Alchirisi and are still led to believe the book is mostly about the bringing low of Gwendolen Harleth by George Eliot. With Lawrence too we get many interesting sentences peering out from the structure of all those utterances about vitalism, some of which concern the way that passion for the cosmos developed from Lawrence's thwarted love for his mother. Finally, with Forster, one must like the early novels a great deal indeed to keep from feeling derisive about Bedient's effort to make Forster fit the scheme. Here again, though, Bedient is just too intelligent to let the scheme be all:

The one novel in which Forster's thinness of specification seems scarcely to matter is *A Passage to India*. Here it is redeemed by groping; it is unsatisfied for all its poise. In keeping, there is here more complexity and mystery of design than in Forster's earlier work; we do not quite know where we are, where Forster is, where the truth can be found, if it can. The characters are quite as unmonumental, as hard to remember after a first reading, as the earlier ones; but in this instance they seem as large and substantial as their world will permit. Their smallness is not a result of Forster's art but a perplexing condition of life.

No architect of the self, then, but characters hard to remember after a first reading—that seems to concede Forster's secondary status, and to indicate precisely the superiority of *A Passage to India* to the other novels, though it doesn't leave Bedient much room to move around in. Anyone who can write this well will come to see ways of escaping the boxes he has put himself in here, and he may well do so quite soon. Flawed as it is, *Architects of the Self* is nevertheless worth reading for its individual excellences of a very high order.

Bernard Bergonzi's *The Turn of a Century* is as English as Bedient's book is American, and so many of its virtues and defects are very different, though unfortunately its fundamental weakness is much the same. Where Bedient is brash and fond of structures, Bergonzi is detached and polite, seldom offering himself as more than your humble reviewer. The essays are incidental pieces, mostly about the period 1890-1920, an era Bergonzi has shown on many occasions he knows superbly. As a result he is often asked to write review of books about Gissing, Wells, Kipling, etc. and so he is often forced to rehearse points he has made elsewhere. The problem is not that reviews should not be put in a book, but rather that Bergonzi's major virtue, after his erudition, is judiciousness, and so, after having carefully arrived at a position, he cannot do much more than say it over again. Out of respect and love for his subjects, Bergonzi tends to accept them all, and so he is often cautious where a more lavish or decisive evocation is needed, polite where he could perhaps afford to be rude, graceful and intelligent in ways that seem to have seldom led him to ask why he does as he does. Thus reading him on authors one does not know, or know well, is always a pleasure, because he is always an informed guide, examples and comparisons at his fingertips. But reading him on authors one knows well is disappointing because, like Calvin Bedient, he tends to leave things as he found them:

Ford grew up in a cosmopolitan, highly artistic household, and when he wanted to depict Christopher Tietjens, a stolid member of the Yorkshire squirearchy, he had to do so from little extensive knowledge of that class. In fact, his friend Arthur Marwood served as an adequate model, and the character of Tietjens is a *tour de force*. Tietjens is used by Ford as the focus of a rather romantic portrayal of the crack-up of traditional aristocratic values, which works by suggestion and implication rather than by direct realism. Americans were accustomed to imagining English society in this heightened and selective way, whereas English readers might find it a distorted picture.

Nothing here is unintelligent or unperceptive. But once you have it, you have it, and quickly thereafter comes the sense of a deflection. Bergonzi's point had been true for some time when he made it in

1967, but it is often enough missed perhaps to bear repeating. The accuracy, though, seems without pressure: are we to accept "distorted" from "direct realism," and "rather romantic" when used as a term of slight denigration, as adequate as description or judgment of *Parade's End*? Well, no, we are not asked to do so, except perhaps by implication, because Bergonzi's subject is the sources of Ford's reputation, but there it is, a book not really talked about, a challenge unaccepted.

I am, I know, being pettish here, and perhaps in another context I would be more grateful for Bergonzi's care and skill. But there are to hand two other new books, both totally English in their bearings, both really interesting and challenging, either one capable of making *The Turn of a Century* seem not good enough. The first is Donald Davie's *Thomas Hardy and British Poetry*, and we can't get past that "British" without sensing that something is up, as indeed it is:

The poems I am to discuss in the following pages have been chosen to illustrate a thesis: that in British poetry of the last fifty years (as not in American) the most far-reaching influence, for good and ill, has been not Yeats, still less Eliot or Pound, not Lawrence, but *Hardy*.

Something like this has been afoot, if I make things out right, for some time now, but the tone of the discussion has always been a little sullen or snarling, either/or argument about Hughes/Larkin/Tomlinson, or, *Is there any English poetry*; someone in this Review, maybe fifteen years ago, quoted someone else as saying there are more good poets in Seattle than in England. What Davie has done, and I think for the first time, is to give the discussion a real shape, tone, stance. It is a fighting but not a narrow book, and it is just what not only the discussion but Davie himself has needed.

It has long seemed to me that Donald Davie has needed a thesis, at least as much as Calvin Bedient needs not to have one. Ever since reading the title essay of *Purity of Diction in English Verse* I have followed Davie's criticism with interest, with a strong sense that he kept doing too little with just the right subjects. He has never backed off from making strong assertions, but he never seems decisively to have put them together. My guess is that he simply grew exasperated trying to discuss modern British poetry with his colleagues and students at Stanford, and, since they wouldn't see, he'd make them see. Well, he has made me see, mostly made me see Hardy, but that is doing a great deal of making, and after that the rest is easier. It is not a complete or even always an orderly book; it treats what Davie wants to treat, leaves the rest for someone else or some other time. One can say the book is about, besides Hardy, Larkin, Housman, Betjeman, Auden (but not centrally), J. H. Prynne, Amis, Tolkien (very interestingly), Lawrence (but not centrally), Roy Fisher. No

Edward or Dylan Thomas, no Spender, Macniece, Empson, Campbell, Graves, Hughes. A carefully selected, aggressive book, then, even a chauvinistic one, but with no attendant Graham Hough-ish silliness, either:

And I hope to do more than merely excuse these characteristics in the Hardy-esque tradition; I want to present them as challenging, and to ask in effect, "Are not Hardy and his successors right in severely curtailing for themselves the liberties that other poets continue to take? Does not the example of the Hardy-esque poets make some of those other poets look childishly irresponsible?"

England is Greece to our Rome, and Davie is saying what, presumably, the Greeks told the Romans for centuries.

Since there is special pleading in this book, let me try to identify the one aspect of it that bothered me. Davie begins with "Hardy as Technician," showing the kind of careful verbal engineering Hardy was capable of managing, showing also its brilliance and its ultimate limitations. Early on he quotes "The Wind's Prophecy," and then says:

What is uncanny is the way the elements are made to menace the traveler, and through associations with technology—the gulls "glint" with a metallic glitter; when the sea comes into sight, its muddy monochrome has a hint of the daguerrotype; and when the sea passes out of sight, the sound it makes is a slamming and a hammering.

Soon we are on to the waves that "Huzza like a mad multitude" as a suggestion, for Davie, of the proletarian masses; that is followed by an excursus into Hardy's occasional contempt for democratic man, and a little further on we are told "it is as if what separated Hardy from Tryphena were the Industrial Revolution itself," which is so preposterous Davie is quick to add, "or at least as if the Nature which divided them . . . were itself a massive machine," which is only slightly less so. A little later on there is more backing away still: "the technological references in the poem are not so unambiguous, nor so insistent, as I have made out." You bet they aren't, the trouble being that, having gotten into his argument the language of technology, Davie then keeps it there despite his apology for the way he got it in. This is a fault that occurs more than once in the book. Often, having made an analogy between the workings of a poem and some other subject, Davie will then go on for a bit about the subject as though the poem necessarily included it when it often does not. But others are going to be more bothered by this than I was; it is the kind of fault you can make much of if you don't like the work in the first place, but which seems minor if the rest seems worth it.

One place where others are sure to object is Davie's definition of "scientific humanist" so as to make Hardy fit the term, but, though I originally felt the term being wrenched, gradually it became clear what Davie means, and finally his insistence on this point seems one of the triumphs of the book:

These impediments to taking Hardy as a whole, the good with the bad, do not come about by accident. Behind them is the curious paradox that Hardy, who imposes himself so imperiously on his medium, imposes himself on his reader hardly at all. On every page, "Take it or leave it," he seems to say, or, even more permissively, "Take what you want, and leave the rest." This consciousness of having imposed on his reader so little is what lies behind Hardy's insistence that what he offers is only a series of disconnected observations, and behind his resentment that he should be taken as having a pessimistic design on his reader, when in fact he so sedulously respects the reader's privilege not to be interested, not to be persuaded. It is on this basis . . . that one rests the claim for Hardy as perhaps the first and last "Liberal" in modern poetry. And it is because we are so unused to liberalism as a consistent attitude in a poet, that we have so much difficulty with the poetry of Hardy.

This seems to me wholly persuasive, and just, too, in its paradox of a Hardy imperious with his verbal medium yet liberal with his reader. And if you agree with Davie here, the rest of the book will pretty easily fall into place.

Perhaps, however, the level of specificity should be lowered. The second chapter, after "Hardy as Technician," is "Hardy Self-Excelling," and it concerns those admittedly few poems in which Hardy's skill is not used as an end in itself or (Davie is good at showing how it often came to the same thing) as a means simply of evoking pain. Here he is on one of the agreed-upon masterpieces:

In "During Wind and Rain" the variation that is so decisive is on the seventh and last line of each stanza:

"How the sick leaves reel down in throngs!"

"See, the white storm-birds wing across!"

"And the rotten rose is ript from the wall"

"Down their carved names the rain-drop ploughs."

Rhythmically so various, the lines are metrically identical. Though anapaests are twice substituted for iambs in the line about the rose, the expectation of symmetry proves that this line too is iambic tetrameter like the others. And the rhythmical variations testify only to a wonderfully fine ear, not to any special expertise in prosody; in other words, to a human skill, not technical virtuosity.

One feels the justification for the speciously dragged-in point about technology finally getting made:

The effect is that when we reach the refrain at the end of the third stanza, though symmetry is maintained between that stanza and the first two, it is so masked by the rhythmical variation that, instead of checking back to register how the stanza reproduces the earlier ones, we are propelled forward to see what will happen in the last.

I am unrepentantly convinced that truly great poems do not benefit greatly from this kind of analysis, but I am also convinced that I am a much better reader of this poem for having undergone this analysis of it:

And thus we experience an unfolding from first to last, not a folding back three times over. The feeling flows into each stanza, brims, and three times pours into the next. Repose transcends pain, as manual skill transcends mechanical technique.

All I can say is that last sentence seems extremely far-fetched, yet convincing.

Then the final placing:

And so his poems, instead of transforming and displacing quantifiable reality or the reality of the common sense, are on the contrary just so many glosses on that reality, which is conceived of as unchallengeably "given" and final. This is what makes it possible to say that he sold the vocation short, tacitly surrendering the proudest claims traditionally made for the poetic imagination.

Thus, if we like, we can have poetry back as raids upon the inarticulate, and Yeats as the supreme poet of the century, but, for the moment, we have something more important, a fully realized Hardy, and a clear road ahead that shows Hardy to be the presiding spirit of later British poetry.

When one accepts "quantifiable reality" as "unchallengeably given," one gives up myth and magic, and gains, implicitly, politics. Whatever the Hardy-esque poets cannot do, they undoubtedly can weigh the consequences of a welfare state employing "a lot of weak government" to sacrifice the traditional, the orderly, and the old countryside for the sake of the needs of all its humanity, the squalid, the heartbreakingly necessary. What happens to order, to worship, to the imperious will; where will poetry lie if these questions are almost paralyzing in their unanswerableness? The answer, says Davie, insisting that the English experience of today is the experience of the world tomorrow, is in the maintaining of traditional stanzas and meters, in the liberal attitude towards readers, that were authorized by Hardy. Thus Larkin, who for all his gloom is centrally equipped to do the implicitly political weighing; thus Betjeman, who, for all the softness of his lyric voice, can do the weighing too; thus Roy Fisher, a writer hitherto unknown to me, whose poem mixed

with prose, *The City*, I found much better at the weighing in the prose than the poetry. What Davie has done is to take what has hitherto been allowed to be a matter of temperament and argument and made it a genuine poetic tradition, alert, responsive, important.

Rather than try to assess the later chapters of the book, I would like to register a small and perhaps not very helpful demurring note. Davie plays many variations on a theme, one of the most important of which is this:

It was English poetry (with Wordsworth) that in modern times first expressed ideas of elemental sanctity and natural piety; and it seems that it must be English poetry which asks what to do with these ideas in a landscape where virtually all the sanctuaries have been violated, all the pieties blasphemed.

The challenge offered is one that asks us to accept or deny the necessity in the future of the whole world becoming like contemporary British poets, and I want to sidestep that challenge by quarreling with some of its implicit premises. Davie's presumption, never stated but always felt, is that the question of the new and the old, the traditional and the socialist is an either/or question: if we use our technology to guarantee a decent material existence for everyone, we will lose what we had. Since Davie creates the issue as one of landscape and sanctuaries, and since my brief experience in England qualifies me best on landscapes anyway, let me say that I found walking in the English countryside, in the legislated green belt around London, in the Lawrence country, in Yorkshire, to be a consistently moving experience, and not just because a piece of Olde England is kept undisturbed. What is most impressive is the way city gives way to country so quickly, the divisions so clearly felt, such that farm, moor, country estate, and village are there, visibly distinct, maintaining a high degree of their integrity. I am told that if one wants to see things as they were one goes to East Anglia, but one really goes to the Scottish Highlands. But I declined when I realized that what had impressed me most had nothing necessarily to do with the way things once were. Yes, there are the disused mines, the superhighways, the signs of suburban sprawl (and the wonderful cooling towers). But only one who wants England as museum countryside could fail to be impressed by the integrity of what is there. Of course a city of ten million people exerts huge influences on its surroundings, but the wonders are that it does not exert more and that many of those it does have not destroyed the fields, the small roads, the copses, the footpaths, all the country pubs and parishes. There may be no more than ten houses in the moorland stretch between Sheffield and Manchester; if one cannot take Keats's walking tour to Scotland just as he did, one could take it with delight, nonetheless. The tourist to this landscape may be spared realization of genuine horrors and terrors, but he is also spared the necessity of seeing any change as a fatal uprooting.

To say this is not, I admit, precisely to state an objection to Davie, or Larkin, or Betjeman, or Tolkien. It may only be to suggest that this Roman perhaps knows something of despoiling that those Greeks do not. It also, let it be said, is one way of introducing Raymond Williams' *The Country and the City*, our fourth, last, and in some ways most important book to hand, a work at least as good as Williams' *Culture and Society*, yet also flawed, and in ways that may even be more damaging than those I see in Davie. It begins wonderfully and sustains itself for so long that one thinks that here is a truly classic work. But no, it finally does serious damage to itself, and, I am afraid, in ways that will not be easily recognized. On the country Williams is consistently engaging and enlightening; on the city, alas, he is consistently ordinary. Fortunately, most of the book is about the former.

A landscape where all the sanctuaries have been violated. Yes. Williams begins with George Ewart Evans, who wrote in 1966, "A way of life that has come down to us from the days of Virgil has suddenly ended," follows with Leavis and Thompson saying in 1932 that the organic community of Old England is gone and "the change is very recent indeed." And back he goes, generation after generation, each one offering voices claiming the old way of life has just now been broken up: George Sturt, George Eliot, Richard Jeffries, John Clare, William Cobbett, Oliver Goldsmith, Philip Massinger, Thomas More. The next step is to start back at the beginning, with Virgil and Theocritus as background, and come all the way down to the present, this time showing the particular changes taking place in each period, the particular countrysides and the feelings each developed, the individual sources of order and change that caused each generation in turn to lament the loss of the recent past.

It is a dazzling performance, and one is impressed about equally between the fresh views Williams offers of familiar figures and the little or unknown ones that suddenly and eloquently appear. I can only mention some things that gave me particular delight and enlightenment along the way. There is a fine equation drawn between Ben Jonson's celebration of the Penshurst estate and Volpone's pride ("I use no trade, no venture"): in both Sir Robert Wroth and Volpone there is nothing that is vulgar, nothing that is displayed, but much that is implicitly ruthless. And if Penshurst was created by abolishing many peasant farms through acquisition and enclosure, so too is Nun Appleton House, and here the recentness of the destruction of the old nunnery forces Marvell's wit to bend strangely in showing the change to be for the better. Then there is a superb weaving of voices—familiar ones like Thomson's, Gray's, Goldsmith's, Crabbe's, unfamiliar ones like Stephen Duck's and Shenstone's, unknown ones like Joseph Langhorne's—that shows just how much feeling for actual farm life and for the lot of the poor could be safely expressed during the agricultural revolution of the late eighteenth and early

nineteenth centuries. Maybe a few quotations can suggest Williams' skill here. First, a preamble to a poor law of 1662:

by reason of some defect in the law, poor people are not restrained from going from one parish to another, and do therefore endeavour to settle themselves in those parishes where there is the best stock, the largest commons or wastes to build cottages, and the most woods for them to burn and destroy.

The results of attempting to tie the poor to their native parishes are unnoticed in literature for some time. There is the beginning of a response to be found in Stephen Duck, himself a thresher, before he learned to pastoralize the poor as his poems became known; it is fully in evidence in Crabbe's picture of the workhouse:

There Children dwell who know no parents' care:
Parents, who know no Children's love, dwell there;
Heart-broken Matrons on their Joyless bed,
Forsaken Wives and Mothers never wed;
Dejected Widows with unheeded tears,
And crippled Age with more than childhood's fears;
The Lame, the Blind, and, far the happiest they!
The moping Idiot and the Madman gay.

Now Williams, summarizing the way capitalist agriculture inevitably led to this:

The good man caught in the system (one of them was Henry Fielding, in a different environment) might temper it with mercy; might see ways of reform. But the limits were there, as part of a whole reality. Justice and overseer, landlord and bailiff, belonged in a common and dominant world. That tale was indeed rigid, and it had not replaced the rural patrons [i.e. Wroth, Fairfax, etc.]. It was founded on them.

And then, showing how even Crabbe deflected from what he saw:

It is not really surprising, though after the quality of the earlier observations it is depressing, to find Crabbe concluding:

And you, ye poor, who still lament your fate,
Forbear to envy those you call the great;
And know, amid the blessing they possess,
They are, like you, the victims of distress.

The case then actually cited—the death of a relative of the Duke of Rutland—is of course real. But in the structure of the poem:

the real picture of the poor

—it is and must be rhetorical. The insight, the indignation, the

caring, of the independent observer, pass by stages to an abstracted general morality and thence to a convenient and ratifying homily:

forbear to envy . . . they are, like you . . .

And then this, in a new form, is that glozing indifference to reality of 'varied fortune' against which, when it had appeared in conventional pastoral modes, the poem had set out to act.

This is the historian, always sympathetic to one who knew what Crabbe knew, but insistent nonetheless that what he knew was not enough.

Of course one understands that Williams is implicitly a Marxist, but, like the Marxism of Christopher Hill, who also has gone over these centuries superbly, it is never doctrinaire, never blinding. If Williams views the Wroths and Burlingtons and Squire Allworthys with scepticism, he never denies the splendor of the literature they inspired. We understand well enough that someone like Williams with scepticism, he never denies the splendor of the literature they by someone who must be kept out of sight, and Christian consolation because it levels all worldly concerns to the same worldly sin and wretchedness, but I locate no place where the bias is seriously distorting, and there are places where it is really cleansing, as in this response to someone who described George Eliot, Hardy, and Lawrence as "our three great autodidacts":

For all three writers were actively interested in learning, and while they read a good deal for themselves, they were not without formal education. Their fathers were a bailiff, a builder, and a miner. George Eliot was at school till sixteen and left only because her mother died. Hardy was at Dorchester High School till the same age and then completed his training as an architect. Lawrence went into the sixth form at Nottingham High School and after a gap went on to Nottingham University College. It is not only that by their contemporary standards these levels of formal education are high; it is also that they are higher, absolutely, than those of four out of five people in contemporary Britain.

So the flat patronage of "autodidact" can be related to only one fact: that none of the three was in the pattern of boarding school and Oxbridge which by the end of the century was being regarded not simply as a kind of education but as education itself: to have missed that circuit was to have missed being "educated" at all.

That is written by a Fellow of Jesus College; it is hard to know what outpost is left where it could be dismissed as Marxist.

So, if Williams' is not a truly original mind, it is almost everything else important: perceptive, learned, flexible, humane. *The Country*

and the City will and should be widely read, but for that very reason its shortcoming must be stressed. The point put crudely is that Williams does not like or at least mistrusts cities; more precisely, he thinks he is continuing to be healthily sceptical when he comes to discuss cities when in fact he is being much too uncritical. To be sure, it looks as though the method is the same throughout, which means that just as he looks at Penshurst and wants to know what farms it displaced and who is paying for its civilized repose, so too he looks at London and asks about conditions in the East End. The trouble is that the standard images of city and country are opposite from each other, so if one were being truly sceptical of the standard view of cities one would ask what it is that Blake's "London" and "The City of Dreadful Night" and Gissing and Engels were missing. Williams is consistently good at seeing the ways that changes in technology and changes in financial speculation, which took place in the cities, in fact had their crucial effects on the countryside, but what actually was happening in English cities is pretty well ignored. Characteristically Williams does not really begin considering cities until he gets to the beginning of the nineteenth century and the Industrial Revolution, and when he does get there he accepts voices like those of Lake Country Wordsworth and Wessex Hardy on London, or that of the Londoner Dickens on Coketown, just as though they could be fully trusted. Keats, who really knew London, is never mentioned, nor is Thackeray, nor Ruskin, to say nothing of John Nash or John Soane. All cities that are not London, furthermore, are presumed to be versions of Manchester. There is a whole chapter on Dickens, but it seems to me blinkered; its presiding spirit, predictably, is the "Oh for a good spirit who would take the house-tops off" passage from "Thunderbolt" in *Dombey*. It is, granted, difficult to do anything like justice to Dickens' varying, changing, and complex view of London without carefully doing at least one of the large novels at length, but such a difficulty should be recognized, not glossed over. Williams is excellent when he shows how George Eliot, in *The Mill on the Floss*, had to shift her means of rendering when she turned from the mill to St. Ogg's, and on the implications of those shifts for the actual knowableness of the community she describes. Similar problems can be felt in Dickens when he moves from, say, the characters of Snagsby and Tulkinghorn and George Rouncewell to the fog, Chancery, and Tom-All-Along's, and they too need exploration. Dickens' power, Williams knows, is the creation and the embodiment of London's power, and that can be a frightening and a wonderful thing. Williams sticks almost entirely to the frightening. And by the time we get down to the period of Shaw's *Music in London*, which is such a wonderful testimony to the city precisely because it has no intention of being anything of the sort, Williams is telling us only about Gissing and Arthur Morison and the Webbs.

VERNON YOUNG

Fool, Thou Poet

NOT THAT THE GODS GAVE US POETS; the poets gave us gods. And wherever, in the imagination of the endowed, those gods still stride the peaks or tread the islands, poetry will be inspirited by their presence or founder in despair from the recognition they command. Greek poets of this century, struggle as they may (and many of them struggle fiercely), are unable to dispel the visions of gods, heroes and philosophers which have permeated not their literature alone but that of every civilised nation in the West. Leafing through Kimon Friar's liberal anthology (780 pages, 400-odd poems, thirty poets—and we are promised another volume to cover poets born after 1912),¹ we meet on every page the presences of the Dionysus myth, the *Iliad*, the Argonauts, scions of the House of Atreus, imposing themselves as “concept” to be reshaped by the modern mind or as “actuals” of the human tragedy, no more unreal than the sacrificial victims of Greece in our time. For most Greek poets, still, there lurks behind every headland a centaur, in every fathom-five a Nereid. A fabulous image created by Yannis Ritsos (1909-) embodies everything I'm trying to say in a mini-review about the tenacity of the Homeric and Athenian traditions. He predicates a Greek youth who, “toward noon” (beautiful touch!) finds himself in an ancient amphitheatre and simply to test the acoustics, or “perhaps out of the untamed joy of his youth,” *shouts* to the empty space. And from the mountainside, an echo answers him:

the Greek echo, which does not imitate or repeat
but simply continues to a height immeasurable
the eternal cry of the dithyramb.

Isn't that *magnificent*?

The best place to read these poems, as I have been finding out, is in an open boat where, if the wind is south-by-east, you may create your own Aegean and imagine, as the swell from outboard fanatics rocks the oars from your grasp, schools of gregarious dolphins, ripening figs, and the orange-trees of Sparta. For in modern Greek poetry, sea and sunlight are always there: the natural world affirms the geography of their myths. *Despite* the ruinous defeats of modern Greek history, and the vulgarizations which no country in our time escapes, *despite* the perennial disillusion or anger expressed by many poets in this volume (the “existential agony” of Kazantzakis; the complex nostalgia of Seferis—

¹ MODERN GREEK POETRY from Cavafis to Elytis, tr. by Kimon Friar. Simon & Schuster. \$20.00.

"Wherever I travel, Greece wounds me"; the anti-poetics radicalism of Nikos Pappas and his wife; the calamitous despair of Kostas Kariotakis who wrote, "All things reject us and all poetry/ fills us with envy as our last asylum," and shot himself, in the shade of a eucalyptus tree, at the age of thirty-two)—despite these signatures of our century, the prevailing note, I think the reader of this collection will agree, is one of unfailing *aspiration*, rectitude of mind warmed by sensuous apprehensions, and the presentness of the Attic past. . . . Of the translations I have no authority to speak, could not if the Greek originals were printed alongside. Where I have had the opportunity to compare Kimon Friar's English with that of other translators I see no reason to regret that the volume is all his: except for—and here I may well be presuming—the poems of Constantine Cavafis. Stiff competition reigns among translators of this authentically decadent poet and the new versions by Keeley and Sherard (Princeton) are for me the most readably direct in conveying what I take to be Cavafis' unique inflection.

This is not a begrudging p.s. Mr. Friar's book is formidable, none like it: the inclusions, the biographies, the *copious* notes, the brilliant essay on translation. When you take up this volume, you hold the Mediterranean in your hand. I want to quote a single poem by George Themelis: because his name is less well known than the four or five most publicized; because the poem is of appropriate length, and because it concentrates the essence of the Greek attitude, as I receive it (heretical, no doubt, to a mystic or an ethologist): that *we* (but our *poets!*) create the world; without us, no world would be.

Outside of us things die.

No matter where you walk at night you hear
 Something like a whisper coming out
 Of streets you have never walked on
 Of houses you have never visited
 Of windows you have never opened
 Of rivers over which you have never stooped to drink
 Of ships on which you have never sailed.

Outside of us die trees we have never known.
 The wind passes through vanished forests,
 Animals die from anonymity and birds from silence.

Bodies die slowly, slowly, by being abandoned,
 Together with our old clothes laid away in coffers.
 Hands we have never touched die out of loneliness.
 Dreams we have never seen, from lack of light.

Outside of us begins death's desolation.

("Desolation")

To turn from Greece to Japan, at least by way of these post-War verses,² is to exchange images of Apollo for netsuke carvings, to enter a world where the salt winds are stilled, where everything has shrunk and become muted, where no one would dream (he might just *dream*) of raising an echo from Fujiyama, where the heroic note has been replaced by the fastidious, and poetry, by custom, is not the place to rehearse universal ideas or to interrogate history in the round. Contemporary Japanese poems are freeform but constrained by centuries of indirection and the impressionist effect, illuminated by an art of the intensely visual. (Aural felicities are naturally modified by translation.) These poems are seldom angry, mostly sad, always clear: they are about death and the ghostliness of life, about the small—comic or sordid—satisfactions of survival: about trains and chrysanthemums and fireflies—and shadows; there are numerous shadows. In their most violated hours, the poets enshrine a rage in amber, like Myoshi (“A Newer Hell”). To translate this heritage and have it appear freshly written in English, its idioms inevitable, is a miraculous act of affection performed by two Celts (a Celt and a Gael?), Harry and Lynn Guest, in collaboration with a Japanese. Some idea of the difficulties to be met are hinted by Mr. Guest’s casual description, in his preface, of Japanese as “a language where for all practical purposes there are no plurals, tenses or relative pronouns and where the subject of a sentence is frequently omitted.” His notes—brief and modest—explaining the translation of a specific word or idiom, are an integral part of this text and must be read; so should his preface, an instructive chronicle of the Japanese poet’s status today: a hopeless one, I’d say. Everywhere one looks, a world is dying. . . . To the next poet I have under review, this is probably no cause for alarm.³

Turner Cassity’s publisher tells us, gratuitously, that the poet, when commuting between America and Africa or Asia, tries to avoid Europe, which he “dislikes.” Dislike is a mild term for the beautifully honed malice with which Cassity, in Augustan couplets, tercets and quatrains, loaded with sight-puns and imprudent rhymes (any of which would further raise the credit of J. M. Brinnin or W. H. Auden), impales the representatives of Decline and Fall he has chosen for most of his nominal topics. Unlike the barbarians of Cavafis, Cassity *did* arrive, and he is *no* kind of “solution”—but he is a wounding pleasure, for he has learned to tongue the Virgilian speech with finer accent than the proconsuls of that Empire whose ruins he intends to celebrate; his salient subject: vanished supremacies (colonial, principally), the acrid comedies of the power game, historical vignettes judged with a hindsight smirk of recognition. For all his epigrammatic facility he

² POST-WAR JAPANESE POETRY, ed. & tr. by Harry & Lynn Guest and Kajima Shozo. Penguin Books. \$2.45.

³ STEEPLEJACKS IN BABEL, by Turner Cassity. David R. Godine. \$6.95.

is difficult to quote in snippets, since the sting in his most effective couplets is best appreciated as the last trump (inevitable but not predictable) of the complex insinuation which has prepared it:

"What is truth?" inquires the League, and then dissolves.
 The exiled emperor is forced to sell his slaves;
 The pontiff washes in the silver bowl that saves.
 ("Pacelli and the Ethiop")

Intransigence your courage, myth your art.
 A rarer bird, a truer Bonaparte,

Across the steppes of your decay—in drag—
 You stump toward Moscow on a wooden leg.

("L'aigle a deux jambes," on a photograph of Sarah Bernhardt in *L'Aiglon*, the most savage of his consummations).

Hart thunders toward his wordy quagmire,
 Achilles toward the checkered flag.

("Of poets and the 500")

Of the latter termination, its full force can be experienced only if the reader connects the title of the poem with its prefatory text from Hart Crane on Indiana, remembering at the same time that the 500 is the 500-mile racing-car event! Few of his poems are any less oblique. "Leander of the Diving Board" (inspired by Leni Riefensthal's *Olympia*) is a sample in brief of the compressed analogy he contrives, with immense elegance and invariable success.

No Hellespont divides my goal from me.
 Immobile in my narrow air, I reach,
 In any given frame, the shore I seek.
 The fickle Hero is the Leica eye.

Not German-Greek, I am not washed ashore.
 If later I act out the tableau, weight
 May then betray me; though I cross—full dress—
 Dark ice soft-focused in a sniper's lens.

He never misses. Every poem of the thirty-five is rewarding to the close reader: a comprehensive entity, scrupulous and inductive, often an accusation, always a profile that includes hints from the pre-history of its features. Placed at the end of the book are poems of mellower tone and their vocabulary is Christian. Cassity asks in his last poem, of cartographers (which recalls the first in the book, of Ulysses tied to the mast): "The known world ends and of the map's vague monsters/ We are one. . . . Behind us, in those bordered lands, does custom/ Growing old/ Map still?/ Must all /who love/In time elaborate this unknown edge?" Yet the strongest impression he leaves is not of questing for a lost continent of love, but rather of having carried out immaculate

executions, in the spirit of St. Just, with the weapons of Alexander Pope.⁴

"The statues are no longer fragments. We are. . . ." Thus Elpenor, in a poem by George Seferis. I daresay Cassity would endorse the sentiment. So, in his own glum-comic way, would Greg Kuzma⁵ who lives, ironically enough, in Crete—(Nebraska)—and from a mid-West of the soul, as if squeezing blood from a turnip makes poems: medium-height, sharp-eyed, hatched under Saturn; easy to take for granted, so skillful is their idiomatic composition and the comparative absence in them of the poetic thrust, the golden adverb. Having read and recovered from Hemingway (and paid his bill with a facetious poem on that encounter), Kuzma coins his own graphic form of understatement, struggling to win a stoic's countenance. Mock-solemnity is the motley he wears best: in "To a Coy Mistress," the refrain, "Do not go out in the Chevrolet tonight/ on the dark roads"; "The Bosphorus," which begins, "I think I will go there/ and taste the important water. . . ." and goes on like that getting funnier and somehow suggesting the translation of an earnest consul's travel diary!—and "Every Day," where he falls upon the thorns of life—and yawns.

It will come to me eventually
that I am really bad off

But what can I do about it
It is more useful to believe
I am getting better
Somebody has to be getting better.
Why can't it be me.

It depresses me to think
I am really bad off.

He can't forever work this deadpan vein and I doubt that he'll want to, for he is self-aware and, besides, has the power to invoke *presences*. "Back from College for a Weekend Pop and I Sit and Talk" (the title is nearly half the length of the poem) engrosses a family history in two dozen laconic lines, without his shifting the camera once, as it were. And I particularly like "Advice on Reading the Confessional Poet"; it displays, to the full and without mercy, his ballpoint eye, his lithographic smile.

Kuzma's advice ("Do not react") would be superfluous to William Stafford⁶ who has long since ceased to react, for longer than a dwarf

⁴ The title of this volume I find irrelevant to its real content; the format, a synchronous perfection. Carol Shloss should be commended.

⁵ GOOD NEWS, by Greg Kuzma. Viking Compass. \$2.45.

⁶ SOMEDAY, MAYBE, by William Stafford. Harper & Row. \$5.95.

stanza, to the corrupt and inane pursuits of his contemporaries. *Report from a Far Place*, third section of these new poems, should stand as the title for all and the counsel Stafford gives in them is mainly for those who *do not* live in “most places”: “if you are oppressed, wake up about/ four in the morning: most places,/ you can usually be free some of the time/ if you wake up before other people”; or for the rare individual who has already learned how to simplify himself:

Out here I stand, a thousand hurts
remembered in every move. I do
a strange dance, but I drink the company
of those who are unafraid.

and now and then, like this,
I hold up my hand for shade.

(“In the Desert”)

No American poet since Robert Frost has been sufficiently courageous—or so downright innocent—to use poetry as a frank exhortation to virtue, plainly disputing the very principle by which everyone else is crucifying his neighbor and calling it “liberation.”

The saddest are those not right in their lives
who are acting to make things right for others:
they act only for the self—
and that self will never be right:
no luck, no help, no wisdom.

(“The Little Ways That Encourage Good Fortune”)

I question the value of many American Indian poems in this volume. If the Indian had never adequately spoken for himself, a Paleface might well have braved the task of speaking for him. Stafford adds little but a sympathetic cadenza to the tribal poetry already collected. (It's a pity that Margot Astrov's excellent anthology, *The Winged Horse*, was permitted to go out of print.) And the effort encourages his tendency to be cute in the Pueblo-Indian manner (see “Wind World”), and to commit Disney-style pathetic fallacies. I'm always surprised when this poet, so true in most of his terse personifications (“An owl—the cold with eyes”) can speak of rain that “types out” a message on the leaves, flowers that “turn puppy faces away from the wind,” or hear in the cry from a desert ditch, “our cousins offering their paws.” These highchair conceits diminish the grave Wordsworthian sanity that informs his choice, premonitory poems, fair-weather cumuli hovering in the afternoon of a fugitive summer, not yet deformed by the upcurrents which will disturb their stability with a rage for thunder. If this seems too aerial a comparison for such a

tellurian poet, you may prefer his own identification with a fallen archangel, "The Lost Meteorite in the Coast Range."

No foot comes here, where
my eye looks up through
grass. This hidden stream
and its long border
belong to the clouds, and
they watch me for their own.
I hold a deep, rich quiet,
falling forever around the sun
through the still sky.

With no gods all their own and with the total breakdown of their civic world as a vehicle of continuing aspiration (or even as a consolatory place to live out the day), American writers in greater number are turning to the wilderness as their one great external source of unadulterated poetry. Joyce Carol Oates (reviewed farther on) asks, in one of her intelligent and lovely poems, "Is all space so empty?/ must we fill it with ourselves?" Of course: only so can it be habitable. To *fill* it, you'd need a heap of majesty; to inhabit it, with any hope of definition as poet, you begin by finding names for its manifestations. This is what Robert Hass⁷ is doing, finding names; if he succeeds as abundantly as he promises in his first bookful of poems, he will soon be a "name," himself, in the growing company of American naturalists. Readers of *THE HUDSON REVIEW* may better remember him from "Book Buying in the Tenderloin," an acrimonious, headlong poem of another sort. In the context of this admirable collection it has more recognizably the sound of another poet, perhaps Robert Lowell. Hass can be vehement, with political edge, in his own way (cf. "Assassin" and "The Failure of Buffalo to Levitate"); on balance, however, the landscape pieces are those that strike roots. Here is his domain: "... calligraphies of pheasant tracks/ in the last crisp snow around the soggy fields./ Some buds, magenta-colored, green-veined,/ sap rising. . . ." He is not yet out of the woods; literally he's safest when in them. Flower-power and injustice-hunting have left their marks. He professes wonder ("Lament for the Poles of Buffalo") that there is no monument to a drunken Seneca who stabbed two defenseless whittlers (in 1802) and was hanged. Under frontier conditions, what could have been a likelier outcome?

In "The Return of Robinson Jeffers" he wants to reclaim Jeffers for "An awkward brotherhood with the world's numb poor" and make his ghost see "finally,/ that though rock stands, it does not breed." These are sentimental condescensions that refute the whole nature of Jeffers' poetry. At the storm center of his work stands the modern

⁷ *FIELD GUIDE*, by Robert Hass. Yale Series of Younger Poets. \$5.00.

heresy he hunted down and for which he shaped his powerful and recurrent incest-symbol: the dependence of contemporary man on social (i.e. sexual) reflections of himself, "the woman, the serpent; the man, the rose-red cavern," and the narcissism of "falling in love inward" . . . "he had given himself to stone gods," says Hass. No. Let's not confuse metaphor with man. If Hass has read Jeffers' letters, he must see that the man was sympathetically *involved*, that he had an informed political intelligence, that it was he who said of another, "I think even poets should read the newspapers," that he busily served on prize-giving juries and addressed himself with conscience to the hard choice of rewarding talent or meeting financial need. And let's be real: he married and had two sons; today, one is a National Park ranger, the other a CPA—"rock . . . does not breed." Mr. Hass said that. Since Jeffers casts the longest shadow over his shoulder, Hass is no doubt performing a ritual-murder of the father. That's to be expected. I simply feel that Jeffers' ghost should not be burdened with even more misunderstanding than its owner took to the grave. (Since no one in America has written poetry more sensual, I'm surprised Jeffers isn't now fashionable!) Hass needs no self-aggrandizement. His purest poetry here (not perhaps his richest but his purest) is in the "Pornographer" quartet. As I read it, the motive is not far from that of Jeffers' "Love the Wild Swan": the fragility of *art* (pornography, for the instance) when tested against the reverberations of history or "the two-note whistles from a cardinal." In these formally perfect verses, beginnings and endings harmonize, revealing themes at a glance, like a sheet of music. Here are two examples.

He had thought March was the blackbird's month.
 April is the blackbird's month. . . .
 All around him is the gravel music
 of the blackbirds' cries.

Like America, his art consists
 in the absence of scale. . . .
 There is no walled city come to.
 The sphinx proposes nothing.
 There is no plague.

There is a plague. "Ever since we began to see death as an absolute end, *everybody writes*" (E. M. Cioran). If anything on earth could, this might justify the presence on the printed page of Diane Wakoski,⁸ a type that never flourished before the New World invented the spoiled child. Her sticky fingers are into everything, tearing pistils and stamens out of the calyx, prying open every oyster, unscrewing the back of every clock, fumbling at the tripe of the poor, carrying torches for

⁸ GREED, PARTS 8, 9, 11, by *Diane Wakoski*. Black Sparrow Press. \$3.00 paper.

negroes and dead women, permanently in a lather about *men*—which *she* spells with four letters. Her manifesto, introducing her so-called Part 9, might have been distinguished as *unbelievable* if anything else she had said were believable; an example—“to make the male chauvinists of the world [*of the world*, no less!] stop comparing me with Sylvia Plath—as if all women of the world who write well must be similar.” (*They’re not?*) At random, I pluck a line from her writing—well, on the subject of Sylvia Plath’s husband: “I know how his gravity pulled on you like a diesel truck attached to yr lip. . . .” (the *ou* is silent as in *your*). In every “slim volume” she becomes more fatuous, more immodest, more importunate, as if she could repair the absence of talent by screaming it into life. There is not an educated thought in this pamphlet. Yet it’s not entirely devoid of uneasy recognitions. “For a woman/ there is only one thing which makes sense:/ a man who loves her faithfully and keeps her warm at night. . . .” I thought she’d never say it.

If she hadn’t said it, she might have been included in *No More Masks!*,⁹ an anthology of poems by Adam’s fractured ribs, “With ladies’ faces and fierce dragons’ spleens,/ Bearing their birthrights proudly on their backs.” This is not an anthology of poems by women, but an anthology of poems by *American* women. (For this the editors have an explanation; for all their odd assumptions they have an explanation.) Given the cultural limits, which should still comprise a hoard of important poems, it is further an anthology selected to assert the uniqueness of women *as poets*, a purpose soon defeated because the greater number of poems included do not represent the best work of the poet but the work that most pointedly asserts her self, or her gender, as the subject. The last half of the book (for which, one suspects, the first was to serve as respectable support—the chronology is from Amy Lowell to next week) is increasingly the poetry of social and race protest which thereby intimidates the reader into confusing the *uniqueness* of women with their alleged servitude (in *America?*!) or with their self-sufficiency (refuted by their screaming it) or with the further right of women to publish sexually explicit poems—a right I’m sure no one has disputed. Hence, it is almost impossible to read these poems *as poems*, with a very few conspicuous exceptions; one is all the time conscious that they are serving a program (the programs vary) or expressing a resentment, usually less relevant to the sex of the poet than to the plebeian layer of society in which the poet is suffering or once suffered or in which she believes—perhaps mistakenly—that everyone else (female and/or black) is suffering. There are shadowy implications in the introduction that women are restricted or victimized by male publishers of poetry, which is patently untrue. (I doubt it

⁹ NO MORE MASKS! An Anthology of Poems by Women, ed. by Florence Howe & Ellen Bass. Doubleday Anchor \$3.95.

could have been true anywhere for at least fifty years.) The opposite is the case in the U.S.A. Every chronicle-time I receive oodles of poems which would have never been published if their authors *had not been* female! The permissiveness of the last ten years has not been restricted to men, and to write a poem about fellatio, as Ellen Bass does, is at best an Alexandrian achievement and scarcely demonstrates the superior faculties of female poets or forwards the cause of womens' liberation (*from what*, except genes, I have yet to find out).

Contrary to the joy in themselves as *women*, which the editors claim for their new poets, my impression is that as Americans of either sex approach "absolute freedom" they are committing cultural suicide. There *are* many good poems in this collection, but it depresses one to see how many among the latterday entries exude cheap contempt for (if not blind hatred of) the object being in fact coveted. (A rabbi in a story by I. B. Singer calls this "waging love"!) And how exclusive the intransigent really likes to be! One of the finest technical achievements in this gallery, Julia Randall's "To William Wordsworth from Virginia," is a beauty built on falsification. For the convenience of the poem, Miss Randall depicts Wordsworth as idly aloof from "the black face of a child in need . . . the bloody figure of a man," grossly ignoring the authorship of "Toussaint L' Ouverture," a poem which might have been penned as a text for the Black Power movement. Set it down as axiomatic. The reformist ethos is always a *lying* ethos.

Daphne, Penelope or Madame Defarge: while they trouble deaf heaven with their bootless cries, Joyce Carol Oates¹⁰ (happily not submerged by inclusion in their company) has spoken for them:

we are bloodstained from common wounds
but we have never known each other
we belong to men and answer to their last names
though we have wiped our hands often
upon each other
we have never known each other
and we are so damp with blood
we fear the muzzles of dogs
will dip into us

—recognizably the subject of the film, *Cries and Whispers*. Blood and ice, the puritan polarities: in another place Miss Oates declares: "we must fight our way out/ of human embraces/ making the calcium of our souls/ hard as the cleanest Northern ice." But her poems are saved from any further comparison with the Bergwomanish world by their greater discretion, their finer tempering, their transmutation, in every case, by the apt coordinating metaphor and, finally, by the generosity of their scope, an attribute entirely missing from the hymeneal

¹⁰ ANGEL FIRE, by Joyce Carol Oates. Louisiana State University. \$4.95.

inferno of the Swedish filmmaker. And in passing I'll note that Bergman's mind, for all its play with theatre as symbol, would never arrive at the artful analogy of Miss Oates's short poem, "Making an End" (the Elizabethan *Act V* as male compulsion!). "Dancer," "At this Moment" and "Nightmare" are sovereign among contemporary love lyrics (if that's an adequate designation) and while I don't like, unnecessarily, to pit one poet against another, I can't resist the conviction that the sensuous alchemy of these poems is a more gratifying experience than the rough male kiss of Ann Sexton's blankets.

at our touching
 which is a groping in immense light
 the bird will take shape strong
 as the daytime air of this room
 its small coiled neck
 its eyes that seem sightless
 its soul somehow pinched inside its beak
 this bird declares its shape to us
 perched at that magical point
 at which our lives touch
 like our bodies

("At This Moment")

If "Iris into Eye" seems too anxious an attempt at restating the lyrical ontogeny of Dylan Thomas ("the ivory fossils of old blood," "the speechless muscle of the brain spins slowly," "I make my way up through marrow," etc.), Miss Oates is more often prepared to sing her own passionate intimations of impassioned clay. When she breaks out of the self—though I don't suggest a consistent triumph of the "public" over the "private" poems—she is, without qualification, impressive: in "City of Locks" or "Revelations in Small Sunbaked Squares" or, excruciatingly, in "Children Who Are Not Kept At Home," from which I quote the gruesome crescendo with its marvellous vowel-song, intermittent scant-rhymes and confident alliteration:

in high-chairs they are kingly, queenly—
 saliva flies
 their lives fly with the day, even

 here behind the scabby vines
 even here their lives rise
 with the day to ponder eternal souls

 unable to walk
 some of them unable to speak or hear
 legless or neckless beings yet eternal

a mile down the road in their special home
 unlived lives live
 mildly for centuries

If titles of poetry volumes, often annexed from a single poem, were chosen for their consistency with the temper of the contents they announce, Judith Hemschemeyer's remarkable first collection would have been christened, "Something is Wrong."¹¹ Her title poem is "very nice"; yet it is not among the first dozen I would pick to introduce her as a new, fearsome talent, classical in manner but inwardly Gothic. To avoid tiresome apologies for truncating or omitting one poem or another, I shall observe curtly that there are several defensively brittle poems here which I trust Miss Hemschemeyer has thoroughly outgrown, then move directly to the summit of her "domestic" poems, "My Grandmother Had Bones," and quote it whole, for so it should be read.

My grandmother had bones as delicate
 As ivory umbrella ribs. Orphaned
 Early, she craved things no one could give her.
 She boiled kettles dry and threw in her hand
 If she was losing. No one outlived her.
 But her health was never quite good. Her cat
 Killed birds and made her cry. Still she kept him.
 She loved green tea, postcards, things from far off.
 "Where does time go to?" she would sigh.
 She went to bed, to mass, coughed her little cough.
 She braided my hair like honey, but I
 Had Mother do it over tight. Some whim
 Made her dislike me, but I didn't care.
 I thought. Why then, when she died, did I dream
 She was a package of frozen meat?
 Why was I chosen to throw her in the stream?
 Why, when I had the bundle gathered neat
 Did her raw wristbone scrape against my hair?

Intensity of mind, intensity of *mind*: that is her secret agent (of her prosodic art, shall we take it as said?); that and her clean resolve to *portray*, unsparing of her subject, unsparing of herself as a bystander more sanguinary than innocent (cf. "Snow," "To My Sister as Lady Macbeth," "Daguerrotype"). Two excellent poems I'd love to transmit, all of a piece, if there were world enough, are "St.-Just-de-Claix, 1957" and "Dürer Went to Sketch the Whale." They belong to a growing stock of critically alive poems on the European subject writ-

¹¹I REMEMBER THE ROOM WAS FILLED WITH LIGHT, by Judith Hemschemeyer. Wesleyan University. \$4.75; \$2.45.

ten by Americans. (I think of John Malcolm Brinnin's "The Alps," "Ich Am of Irlaunde," "The Saint in the Picture"; James Merrill's "Three Sketches for Europa"; John Peck's "Cider and Vesalius"; and "Lines for Leibniz"; Frederick Nicklaus' "Fonte Vecchia," "Leopardi," "Rilke's Panther." And I've not yet named Miss Hemschemeyer's masterpiece of the unbearable, "Dresden," structured with shocking verbal power. The poet first conjures the "lustrous images of man" shaped in Dresden porcelain by a guarded formula: "It was split in two. One workman knew the clay,/ The "bones" of it, and one the glaze, the "flesh."

. . . . So on the day they said
 Dresden was bombed and the tide was turning,
 I saw swans sliding off marble mantels,
 Diving to death. Now I know the burning

 Was visible for two hundred miles
 And lasted six weeks. Water tanks and cellars
 Were kilns where racks of quiet Germans baked.
 Air was hot poison, but they sipped until
 It was gone and death pinched their green nostrils shut.

 I dreamed eyes bulged by tens of thousands, broke
 And spilled down cheeks like botched blue underglaze.
 The zoo flew open, too, and stranger beasts
 Than ever twisted on tureens howled
 At bay in the Altstadt's blazing cul-de-sacs.

"Composition," wrote young Delacroix in a letter to a friend, "gives wisdom and steadiness to a terrain shaken and set on fire by volcanoes. There lies the integration that alone makes for greatness."

Composition, in a reading of the word that transcends even this dignity, is the embracing magnitude that endows Laurence Lieberman's second volume of poems with total integrity.¹² This must be recognized promptly, for the attribution to Lieberman of "Whitmanesque" length and breadth might dissipate from the start any thought of compositional integrity. If, in poems appropriate to the comparison, he is indebted, he has revised the apostolic creed with the very disciplines customarily shunned by those who rehearse it. Lieberman may be easy to read carelessly since, when he is most energetic, he seems to write breathlessly; from the appearance of his poems on the page—long, long strokes and short choppy ones; dots and dashes, peristaltic passages muscled with alliteration; indented short-step blocks like ziggy-rats; hyphenated gerunds and tandem modifiers ("flipper-flapping," "wind-whipped," "love-sucking") and so on—you might infer a free-

¹² THE OSPREY SUICIDES, by Laurence Lieberman. Macmillan. \$6.95; \$1.95.

ming protean shapes to elude the insistent agonies of self-consciousness, exploring the depths, scanning the ether, stalled in the halfway region of domestic hope and alienation, a place as weird in its way as the lobster cave of that appalling *tour de force*, "Lobsters in the Brain Coral." Take my program notes on trust, common reader, but if, usually, you "dip into" a book of poems, break the habit for Lieberman: read this "collection" as if listening to a concerto—from beginning to end. The poems of Section One take place on or underwater; those of Two on dry land ("Increasing Night," "Frozen Pipes," attempts at communion) ending with "Scissors," just as the first sequence had resolved itself, desperately, with "The Spearing" ("Who am I chasing—underwater—in my life?"): Part Three opens with drought, moves through sky-high images and killings back to water, the river that separates and unites (a priest and a clergyman who join hands after common battle with murderous piranha). . . . Now play it back. Here are the first words of the first poem. "No one/ can teach us the deepwater/ Moves—we are swimming a dance to music/We cannot hear in our heads." And the *aria da capo* of the final poem, following correspondences and restatements that crowd the page, is delivered by Ramon, the priest:

Under the river,
under the dark
 flowing dream of the rivergod's
long sleep, the hurt body learns, the body wounded
 unwounds, the body winded, unwinds
 a wisdom
 of tough scarskins.

Brave and inexhaustible voice—more often than of Whitman he reminds me of Hopkins, having, it is true, the same tendency to become hypnotised by his own homographs. This is my only reservation, a small one. Lieberman is a Heracles among American poets.

*

Our salt march ended before the city.
The king said, "Their roofs are tall."
We closed the five roads into the city.
They threw down stones from the wall.
Bones were broken, a skull, twelve ribs.
We commandeered fields round the city
And cattle, barns, horses, women, wells.
They threw down fire from the wall.
A skull was charred.
Roofbeams hissed in the Seine.
We circled the wall with dice and wineskin.

The city rotted slowly
 Like a spotted corpse in a charnel.
 They threw down insult and curse
 But that hurt no-one.
 The men from the fjords are not sensitive. . . .
 ("Sea Jarl")

George Mackay Brown, a sweet and bloody-minded Scots poet,¹³ would have us believe that "Arkol the skald mingled these words with harp strokes at . . . Orphir in Orkney in the Yuletide of 1015." Since Hugh MacDiarmid deserted the language (I mean more than his *dialect*) for that of neo-Platonic Marxism and paleontology, Brown is left to restore the national pride with poems that have catgut in their sinews; poems that toll like bells through the salt fog; poems that make you look over your shoulder, a gull just flew into the room; poems as simple-seeming as Housman's, with a touch of Breughel. Brown, a fisher of men who but labor in their vocation (Vikings, tinkers, shepherds, poachers, sots at a fair), and a fisher of syntax from every living source of our language appropriate to his poems—although the accents of saga and ballad predominate—is himself an island man, native to Orkney where, having escaped the world's nets, he still lives; his task: "a pure seeking past a swarm of symbols,/ The mill-wheel, sun, and scythe, and ox, and harrow. . . ." The sources of a poet's language are both private and endemic. Scotland and Ireland (possibly Wales) are the *only* places in the English-speaking world where "the people" (not all, but many) are worth overhearing, their daily talk, melodic and inventive, uncontaminated by the international-urban sludge that is fouling the stream of the richest language on earth. It is tempting to read Brown's "Runes" as his bedrock departure for the terse, conjunction-less movement of such poems as "Sea Jarl." "*Skerries*. A fanged treeless island./ On shipwrecked wood/ Men die, love, cry sunwards." "*Winter*. Three winter brightnesses—/ Bridesheet, boy in snow,/ Kirkyard spade." "*Entrances*. Between thief and hoard/ Three narrow doors—/ Furrow, maidenhead, grave." I doubt, however, that he composed in that order, i.e. to the more complex from the "archaic" (and what *is* an archaic form?—if a poet makes it live, it's not archaic!). The runes I've quoted from are included under "New Poems" (the earliest poems in the selection were published 1959). Brown achieved their crystallized eloquence with canny sophistication, formed on the way by graduate studies in Gerald Manley Hopkins and the authorship of three volumes of prose fiction. Exemplary, but not exceptional, are the closing stanzas of "The Five Voyages of Arnor," for noting his marvellous transitions, the lines cool and open-vowelled when Arnor, the Viking poet, recounts a journey to the Holy Land: "Prayer on a hundred white wings/ Rose

¹³ POEMS NEW AND SELECTED, by George Mackay Brown, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$5.95.

every morning. . . .", then abruptly, into the last stanza, Arnor dying, sibilants multiply, the speech is tight-lipped and three proper names, one harsh, pack a line—"Dublin, Micklegarth, Narbonne." Arnor makes his peace and the wonderful ranging poem ends with matter-of-fact magic:

I have said to Erling Saltfingers, *Drop my harp*
Through a green wave, off Yesnaby,
Next time you row to the lobsters.

Freedom from the rhetorical or abstract resolution is characteristic of his "story" poems; the last lines of "Shipwreck" (the fates of six other men have been told) are, in this wise, stunning:

For Donald the way was not long.
 His father had a dozen horse at Skail
 But Donald loved the dark net.
 Indeed for Donald the day and the way were not long.
 The old men said,
 "Such skill at Greek and physics and poetry
 Will bring this Donald fame at last."
 But for him the day was not long.
 His day was this long—
 Sixteen years, four months, and two days.

He never learned that from Hopkins. What he probably learned was how to vary his line lengths, and his metres within the line or stanza, how to excite the solemn pace of a devotional verse (cf. respectively, the second stanza of "The Year of the Whale"; "Carol" and "Elegy"). Yet *where*, between Skelton and Keats, would one place the wintry-lyrical next-to-last stanza of "The Funeral of Ally Flett" which, with iron control, I shall refrain from quoting here?. . . George Mackay Brown is giving back to poetry much of its ancient courtesy—Greek or Norse: to tell a tale, to commemorate human mischief and to cast spells about our ears. To support my belief that his is the most "wizard shape" to appear in British poetry since Dylan Thomas', I offer "The Condemned Well," a cantata of his skills, a work I have promptly added to my select anthology of great poems about the finite world.

Turgid, sweet. The well on the brae
 Wet fifteen mouths all summer.
 To the sisters of Scorrán
 The well was lover, the water kisses and secrets.
 Shall we mention Linky the tailor
 Who stitched that silk through his rum?
 We shall not forget that drunken cross-legs.

The horse of Quoygarth
Raised there an ecstatic streaming skull,
With square barbarous teeth, black curling lips!
This was the theatre
When Coghill, hotly pursued
By lawyer, creditor, lover
Drenched his deliberate throat with death.
Shall any complain
Because a golden bee hung here
For his tiny ration?
Fool, thou poet, thou rememberest
Ada and Mary and Ann
Who sank bright buckets here.
Poet, those were beautiful girls
Nor could thy net of words hold one.
All these, certainly more,
Drank from that rocky breast,
For always were tinkers passing
And flies that drown
And raging Sabbath thirsts from the ship beyond.
Fool, thou poet,
Tomorrow is the day of the long lead pipe.

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BRUCE ALLEN

Delight and Terror

THE TITLE, INESCAPABLY ONOMATOPOETIC,¹ establishes firmly an ambience wherein we are prepared to hear of Poe (the dark Gothic bogeyman of American letters; repressed, hesitant revealer of the psyche's unutterable secrets; in the mercilessly pungent words of J. R. Lowell's *Fable for Critics*, ". . . Poe, with his raven, like Barnaby Rudge,/ Three-fifths of him genius, and two-fifths sheer fudge"). The explosive initial consonants tattoo a sharply rapping ground-theme, like the beating of some unstifleable tell-tale heart. Yet the triphammer insistence of it is followed by those wearying long o's—suggesting tarns and weirs shadowed by menacing foliage, overwatched perhaps by ravens and their like. Is it an artful arrangement of sounds, or the unsolicited outrushing expression of Poe's long monotonous gloom?

Daniel Hoffman's fine book has it both ways. It offers the view that *all* of Poe's work comprises a deliberate, and paradoxical unity: "His art conceals while it reveals, reveals while it conceals . . . [putting] the actual experience at an aesthetic distance . . ." (73). This indispensably corrects the long-prevailing notion that has pictured Poe as a helpless neurotic uncomfortably possessed by a genius he was too immature *to control*. Yet Hoffman revitalizes him without sacrificing any of the choicer psychographical gossip. In fact he accepts, quite blithely, the usual assertions of his subject's embarrassing imperfections (that Poe was unwholesomely libidinous, Oedipal, less-than-a-man, desirous of womb-return). This Poe is a dreadfully compelling figure despite them.

Hoffman's thesis is that the eccentrically individual parts of Poe's corpus (the poems; the argumentative essays in literary theory; the tales—of ratiocination, of grotesque and arabesque-rie; even the serenely incomprehensible "prose poem" *Eureka*) cohere, because they are fragments of a consistently articulated conception of the universe. We learn early, tantalizingly, that Poe rests his cosmologizing on a theory of "double motion," a sort of systole-diastole or self-contradicting movement. How this may be reflected microcosmically, in man, is a bit confusing; but there is a hint, when Hoffman tells us that "Poe . . . splits man—splits himself—apart into mutually exclusive functions, yet insists upon the essentiality of their unification" (168). We can sense a connection. But Hoffman, as if he were Inspector Dupin posing as a New Critic, is inducing, slowly building up a case; look-

¹ POE POE POE POE POE POE POE POE, by Daniel Hoffman. Doubleday Anchor. \$2.50.

ing for the defining characteristics of the *oeuvre* among the scattered evidence from Poe's altogether eerie lifework.

More than an exegesis, his book is a complex labor of love/hate. Confessing a lifelong fascination with Poe (he admits that "for years 'Ulalume' made me sick"—70), Hoffman announces an intention, not just to study the life and work, but to "do justice to the actual experience of reading Poe, of reading him again and again over half a lifetime" (xi); to try to render "how Edgarpoe wormed his way into my guts and gizzard and haunted my brain and laid a spell upon my soul which this long harangue is an attempt to exorcise" (25).

This personal element takes two main forms. Interleaved with detailed critical-biographical analyses are accounts of Daniel Hoffman's own helpless immersion in Poe, little inset stories of frightened first readings as a boy; then, of later, more determined grapplings, as the grown man looked for explanations of the strong power those stories had for him in childhood. Hoffman tells of being haunted by a mysterious image—surely from Poe, but in what tale or poem?—of a climber on a clock-tower, about to be decapitated by a threatening minute-hand. (He finally locates it, in the essay, "How to Write a *Blackwood's* Article;" and the motif of critical detection is thus slyly introduced.) Elsewhere, Hoffman pointedly notes that he and Poe share the same height; openly puzzles over the tempting interrelatedness of the man's life and work; *talks* to the shabby shade of Poe, admonishing, adjuring, really giving it to him, for his lush, creaky excesses ("Come off it, Edgar!").

The rhetorical bombast is fun, and it enlivens the book. But occasionally one wishes for moderation. Hoffman contrives a host of tricky nicknames: in addition to Edgarpoe (from the admiring French), there are, among others, "Hoaxiepoe," "Idgar," even—God help us—"Oedgar." In discussing such unprovables as Poe's distaste for consummating marriages (we're assured that the very idea "struck his imagination with terror"—241) and presumable impotence, Hoffman fails to resist tossing off smart-alecky speculations about "whether he could get it up or not."

It's a gimmick, and a calculated gamble. It does communicate the excitement, and mixed pleasure, in reading Poe, and in making real discoveries among his works. (There *are* discoveries here; and there is, perhaps most helpful of all, a sensible guide to the very best tales and poems of each Poe type.) The problem is that Hoffman oversells the originality of his approach, and overvalues his deductions. There is maddening periodic repetition in the ubiquitous grammatical form of such utterances as "What . . . is . . . 'The Philosophy of Composition,' but a demonstration of how he wrote . . . 'The Raven' " (76); or, ". . . what is plot but the management of a human action in time?" (204)

That pattern is repeated annoyingly; and, in the last third of the book, almost desperately. It's a rhetorical trick, obviously deployed to

enlist the reader's participation in seizing delightedly on conclusions. But here it long outlives its usefulness. As we near the carefully prepared revelation of Hoffman's central idea—his key shaped to unlock all of Poe—the genuine excitement we feel in perceiving it, a part at a time, is disastrously undercut by the bluff obtrusiveness of Hoffman's cloyingly boyish verbal games. (You repeat yourself *ad*—even *post*—*nauseam*, Hoffman. Who the hell do you think you are, anyway? The raven?)

Nonetheless, it's not a decisive flaw. For Hoffman's study is a richly rewarding map of the route traveled by Poe's feverish imagination. He rests it on the idea of a *dualism* that is deeply locked in Poe himself, and which becomes the articulating impulse behind everything Poe was to conceive:

One side of his art is the effort to create the ineffable, the bower of unutterable delight. But the road thither is terrifying, frightening, for . . . Edgar Poe must put in direst jeopardy the only life he knows—this one, miserable as it is—in his quest for a realm of being more sublime. Therefore delight and terror are everywhere mingled in a weird harmony in Poe's writings. (46)

Two idea-bases are laid down initially. Hoffman then goes on to analyze how each is incarnated in Poe's early works; then reveals how ever-deepening and more complex variations of these originating conceptions are an expression of the metaphysic which underlies his work.

The first is that "the inventor of such seemingly trivial popular amusements as the detective story and the science fiction tale is also the systematic philosopher of the Absolute Autonomy of Art" (xii). Everything he ever wrote indicates that Poe believed in the superior reality of Art, and imagined it as a refuge to which the sensitive soul escapes from the dulling restrictions of temporality. (Here, by implication at least, is the clearest explanation yet offered of the spellbinding fascination "Edgar Poe" held for Baudelaire and the other Symbolists.)

The second is Hoffman's gut feeling that Poe sensed a frightening *contradiction* at the innermost core of experience; that he elevated it to the stature of a controlling principle in that world-embracing explanation of the nature of things ("a metaphysics all physics") which Hoffman breaks down for us, revealing all gradually, as it is revealed by Poe's works themselves. What keeps us determinedly reading, and onto what Hoffman is attempting, are his frequent reminders that (what I shall call) the *contradiction-principle* is wedded to Poe's idea of universal "double motion"—itself consistently embodied in the eerie dualities that structure his works. On this level, a duality-principle is easily grasped; we've all noted it (in "William Wilson," or perhaps "The Tell-Tale Heart"); so we're willing to read on, and accept the *ur*-idea as Hoffman digs it out for us.

The central argument can be stated without murdering suspense. It derives essentially from Coleridgean faculty psychology, fuzzied up with semi-precise infusions of rudimentary physics and astronomy. Put simply: Poe believed that we all aspire, by any necessary means (not excluding self-destruction), to return to a primal condition of "Oneness," from which we have become separated. The universe itself, fragmented into errant particles, feels a similar impulse to bring itself back together. Yet this impulse is resisted by the contrary tendency of *matter*, spilling out to assert itself separately, away from all Oneness. To the extent that man is composed of matter, he irresistibly follows this separatist impulse. But man is also made of Spirit, whose gravitation is away from multiplicity, toward unity.

There's the source which Hoffman proposes for the tensions implicit in Poe's works. The individual longs to escape from the abrasive multiplicities of earthly reality. The soul flees from the body, toward ideality. Art pursues an abstract conception of perfect realization. The imagination, out of place in this world, must create its own (anti-) world.

The premise is especially challenging, because it allows to the haunted, enfeebled psyche of the ever-frustrated Poe greater creative power and self-discipline than are unambiguously evident from the sometimes shrill testimony of the works themselves. To believe that the shift-eyed "Oddgar" (see what you made me do, Hoffman?) was not only a dedicated aesthete-idealist who envisioned the far-off enthronement of Intellect and Beauty, but also a self-willed cosmographer who tutored himself in the sciences sufficiently to structure a complex imaginative justification for those aesthetic principles . . . (Do you really expect us to believe that, Hoffman?)

Indeed, once the weighty claim is made, Hoffman dilutes it, conceding that all such structurings were pure defensive conceptualizing:

Poe was always about to explode into the pieces of his divided, anguished self. His efforts at unification are arbitrary, willed, obsessional, incomplete. His consoling philosophical solution to his sufferings is to conceive of the universe as an impulsion-machine, the nature of whose motions his own mind could trace, and imitate. (169)

Like a very Poe detective, Hoffman assembles the evidence with meticulous determination. He surveys Poe's works by genre and theme, concluding with summary analyses of particularly revealing individual works: the eerie *Narrative of A. Gordon Pym*, the mind-deadening *Eureka*, and "Poe's Gordian knot of incest, inhumation, murder, and madness" (316), "The Fall of the House of Usher."

An energetic picture of Poe-as-artist emerges from Hoffman's intriguing chapter on the poems. It is a disarmingly informal ramble

through several topics that seem only loosely related. Citing their frequent “gaudy grandeur,” he yet admits that their awkwardly elevated, impossible language renders Poe’s poems at their worst “either grotesquely incompetent or purposively artificial, mannered, and ridiculous” (76). That’s plain enough. He finds a solid thematic link between Poe and the elegantly artful Nabokov (the creator of the “Annabel Lee”-obsessed Humbert Humbert, and of “Anti-Terra”). He shows us how conceptions of powerful subtlety are regularly flawed by journeyman descents into bathetic rhyme or ludicrous overstatement:

Poe isn’t always in as full control of his language as he is of his vision. . . . Poe sometimes . . . seems trapped by a set of conventions inadequate to express the radical clarity of his vision. (59)

Only modest claims are made, then, for most of the poems. But in those Hoffman selects for serious analysis, he discovers a pattern of consistent meaning. The early “Al Aaraaf” (“Poe’s hymn to intellectual beauty”—42) describes—albeit in diction of suffocating opaqueness—an ideal region to which the Soul/Spirit/Imagination flies. The limpid “To Helen” also embodies an Ideal—this time, a conventionally classical one (Hoffman neatly celebrates its virtues as “stunning compression and swift imaginative movement”—64). Poe’s “Sonnet—To Science” shows the erosive action of science and its “dull realities,” “prey [ing] on the poet’s heart.” Hoffman drives the point home: “Since Imagination has been driven from . . . this earth, it must seek its proper home ‘in some happier star,’ not on earth at all, not at all in this life.” (49) In “The City in the Sea,” Poe succinctly dramatizes his preference for ideality, by depicting “the death of the universe.” The imperfect world once left behind, only the ideal remains. The Intellect reaches toward the Ineffable; the Soul departs from the Body.

The successive chapters of Hoffman’s book show how, in each *kind* of literary work he essayed, Poe made resourceful use of this pattern of loss and compensation-for-loss. A brief discussion of Poe’s criticism, focussing on “The Philosophy of Composition,” sensibly understates that famous essay’s weaker precepts (its insistence, for example, that *unity of effect* is best served by a poem that is *exactly* one hundred-and-eight lines long), and rightly describes it as an afterthought-justification for what Poe was going to write *anyway*. But, in specifying that the only possible theme for poetry is the death of a beautiful woman, and in its sidelong references to “the human thirst for self-torture” and “the luxury of sorrow,” it plainly prepares us for “The Raven.” Hoffman sees that poem, interestingly, as the ultimate refinement of Poe’s insistence on repetition through emphasis, and of his attempts at rendering obsessions through language.

So, it's another link in demonstrating Poe's cagy deliberateness. But Hoffman is also digging up solidier evidence, to support his overall thesis. The essay displays Poe's delight in cryptographic challenges; his pedantic discriminations (again, in essence, Coleridgean) between "Fancy" and "Imagination"; his continuing interest in psychological imbalances. It is *distinctions*, *divisions* which receive the weight of emphasis; falls away from some ordered aesthetic dream of grace-in-unity.

Poe had likened the construction of a poem to the solution of a mystery; Hoffman finds further consistency in the tales of ratiocination and detection. Such chestnuts as "The Gold Bug" and "The Purloined Letter" are acts of discovery, in which the crime to be solved is really a pretext, allowing the detective's analytical intellect to pleasure in its ability to "disentangle." Poe's mystery-solvers work always by association, and suggestion, taking judicious account of the irrational: they are tuned in on his cosmos. Not only is such intellection "man's highest power, . . . his most characteristic human act" (112). Hoffman puts it in the context of Poe's basic ideas about human faculties and their functions: "We 'think,' or . . . 'ratiocinate' in order to arrive at an approximation of the suprarational which is Beauty, sublimity, or . . . the primal unity. . . ." (96) (Very clever, Hoffman. All this is hard to dispute.)

But his heavy Freudian reading of "The Purloined Letter" (substantially indebted, as are other parts of the argument, to Marie Bonaparte's notorious "psychological study" of Poe) alternately fascinates and infuriates. The value of it lies in Hoffman's ingenious application of the idea of *doubleness*. We can easily concur that crime, and punishment, are facing halves of a unified experience; that "the disentangling intellect of the detective is but the mirror-image of the monstrously amoral genius whose nature requires that he commit piracy, purloining, murder . . ." (129). Does this mean that the solution is but the objectifying of the criminal's wish to be discovered, and punished? If so, where is the *active* human intellect? It is a troublesome parturition, emphasizing as it does the destructive half of one's nature (the distinction will be crucial in Hoffman's study of the "arabesques," where such compulsions seem more fitting). And yet, thus to emphasize "destructiveness" fits us neatly into Hoffman's thesis.

And this, clearly, is where the thesis is too rigid. Every scintilla of evidence from Poe's work must be wrenched around, and squeezed into the *schema*.

Sometimes it betrays itself in obvious contradictions. For example: Hoffman claims that Poe's crimes are abstractly worked up, as intellectual puzzles; yet points out that Poe's oft-trumpeted "essential" theme, the death of a beautiful woman, is a motivating obsession behind "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." (But contradiction is of the *essence* in Poe, you say? Yes, I hear you, Hoffman, damn you.)

The method is applied through several more chapters of often intensely exciting, revealing criticism. And, somehow, Hoffman's claims seem less tenuous as the book reaches toward the farthest limits of Poe's world-renouncing creations. (It is unarguable that his latter works arch more and more "toward the expression of pure archetype with as little as possible of the texture of actuality . . ."—325). Poe's strength is in his powerfully fragmented sensibility; the further he stretches beyond our power to delimit and describe him, the tighter does he grip us.

There is much more. A lucid chapter on "Voyages," demonstrating that Poe's travellers too (Hans Pfaal, the descender into the maelstrom) are ratiocinators, testing their powers against the mute challenges of Nature and bringing back from their ordeals "revealed knowledge" of worlds out beyond our own known ones. The voyages are in effect *allegories*, in which representative human intelligences engage in actions that bring them to such knowledge.

But everywhere in Poe the revelation of such truth poses a constant threat. The "grotesques" and "arabesques" become, accordingly, dramas of revelation wherein terrible deeds are committed, then uncovered—their perpetrators driven by an urgency no less terrible. Thus "The Tell-Tale Heart" dramatizes the conflicting pulls of life-and-death urges. The haunting "Ligeia" renders an obsessively desired reunion, into Oneness, through a disintegration that Poe elevates, by a "progression of analogies," into an apocalyptic "interpenetration of the organic and the inorganic" (245). The magnificent "Fall of the House of Usher" becomes a paradigm of the willed self-destruction of the individual psyche, reflecting the uncanny power of the unconscious.

Most of it works—though by the time we've reached Hoffman's courageous excursus of *Eureka* (" . . . what is it," he chortles, "other than a master code-breaker to Poe's *oeuvre*?"—274), we seem to have known all along that to Poe matter and energy are the same; the universe's motion of fragmentation-unification implacably limits humans to tottering indecisively between "the life-wish . . . [and] the will to self-destruction . . ." (289).

What is most remarkable about it all is that the reductive mechanism which Hoffman clearly demonstrates in Poe's thinking nowhere vitiates our acceptance of his stubborn portrayal of the artist's self-estrangement from reality. We see it as a defense; we know that, in strictly logical terms, it doesn't work; yet we believe it.

There is the peculiar power in Poe—and in this sometimes flawed, but essentially *right* book. We can believe that there is an underlying unity in Poe's work, and be grateful that it has been so graphically demonstrated to us. But in our hearts we know it is a unity which feeds on, and coexists with, a wonderful jagged wealth of diversity. Some contradictions, it must be said, are not to be entirely

resolved; their terms should be allowed to persist on in their un-mendable isolation.

You see, don't you, Hoffman, that—in your own words—what we prize in Poe is “his heroic effort to rejoin those faculties which in himself he felt so fatally to be sundered” (322). Is there proof that he ever did, finally, “rejoin” them? Would we still read him as we do, if there were?

I'll tell you, Daniel Hoffman, what your book reminded me of. When I was around seventeen, I discovered D. H. Lawrence, and read all of him—voraciously, uncritically. I couldn't get away from that dogmatic, hortatory, *vivid* presence, haranguing me, insisting that I be alive to the things he was showing me.

A short while later, I turned away from such overripe effusiveness, telling myself (as those who consider themselves literary people will do) that I preferred understatement and restraint. It's what has happened to people who insist they would rather read Tolstoy than Dostoevsky.

But any such discriminating is dangerous, because it flatters our feeling that we are subtler, deeper than ordinary intelligences; it's an unjustifiable exclusivity, limiting our ability to respond and take delight in the artist's (one almost wants to say, God's) profusion. It isn't for us to say that the struggle naught availeth; we must not close doors.

Well, I came back to Lawrence—to *Women in Love*, the poems, *The Man Who Died*; realizing (I now tell myself) that the overmanaging and overwriting are themselves deeply principled acts; responding (I hope) to *both* the surface excitement and the tightly-knit art, loping gracefully alongside the lumpy theory-ridden excrescences.

This is why your work on Poe is really helpful—don't you see? Forget the formal necessity of bringing it all together into a total unity. Poe is a unity only in the way in which his ambitious nervous sensibility labors to engulf all of reality, and reduce it to meaning. Thus is there a world in Poe; and the world is the unity.

Solid as rock beneath its lip-service to “overmastering unity,” I think your book sees this necessary paradox, and pays invaluable homage to it. As “The Purloined Letter” shows us, it is sometimes necessary to discover what was obvious all along.

JOHN SIMON

Pentimental Journey

I AM GLAD THAT Lillian Hellman entitled her new book of memoirs *Pentimento*¹ and so taught me a fine new word. In a prefatory note, she explains: "Old paint on canvas, as it ages, sometimes becomes transparent." One can then

see the original lines: a tree will show through a woman's dress, a child makes way for a dog, a large boat is no longer on an open sea. That is called *pentimento* because the painter 'repented,' changed his mind. Perhaps it would be as well to say that the old conception, replaced by a later choice, is a way of seeing and then seeing again. That is all I mean about the people in this book. The paint has aged now and I wanted to see what was there for me once, what is there for me now.

That is nicely phrased and sounds promising. For *pentimento* usually means a painter's changing his mind about the specific way in which a particular thing is to be shown—whether a leg is to be bent or straight. It is not so much a child making way for a dog, or a tree for a woman's dress, as getting the foreshortening of an outstretched arm down correctly, or catching the exact curve of a brow. So, I assumed, a collection of verbal portraits would show how the sitter looked to Miss Hellman then and now: the past impressions would show through the present's overpaint in such a way that they would comment on, correct, reassess each other, allowing for certain paradigms of change and permanence to emerge in the process. This, however, is rarely what Miss Hellman gives us; rather, she lets the tree peep through the woman's dress until we see the tree for what she now takes it to mean, not as a fascinating set of cross references between what was and is, or what was and is no more.

But, all right, let the book be no more than a *pentimental* journey into the past; if well done, that is quite good enough. And indeed it soon becomes apparent that Miss Hellman is using the portraits—or *pentimenti*—of this book to continue and fill out her autobiography, which, under the title *An Unfinished Woman*, appeared in 1969. That book ended with three *portraits-souvenir* (to use Cocteau's term) that were themselves *pentimenti avant la lettre*, so to speak; more importantly, the last sentences read "All I mean is that I left too much of me unfinished because I wasted too much time. However." That terminal "however" was no mere stylistic cuteness,

¹ PENTIMENTO: A Book of Portraits, by Lillian Hellman. Little, Brown. \$7.95.

although it is that, too; very likely it was meant as an allusion to Ibsen's dying word, *tvertimot*, meaning "on the contrary." He was giving the lie to his nurse's optimistic statement about his condition; Miss Hellman, a neo-Ibsenite, gives the lie to the notion that her time has been largely wasted. What a difference between these *tvertimots*: one a bleak facing up to the grimmest of finalities, the other a hopeful acceptance of one's life as not having been such a botch after all. Which might explain why Ibsen's plays are dramas and Miss Hellman's mostly melodramas with vaguely happy endings. But let us come back to *Pentimento*.

The book is made up of seven essays of varying length, five of them dedicated, at least ostensibly, to obscure but noteworthy individuals. "Bethe" concerns a rather primitive but handsome cousin of Miss Hellman's imported by the rich New Orleans immigrants, the Bowmans (Lillian's mother was *née* Bowman), to become wife and sedative to a young ne'er-do-well of a Bowman. The marriage fails and Bethe becomes the mistress of a local mafioso, and a social outcast. Fourteen-year-old Lillian, precocious and highly impressionable (as what author, at least in his own reminiscences, wasn't?), learns from Bethe how much more meaningful than marriage an unsanctioned union can be. The mafioso is killed, Bethe gets involved with lesser men, and is suddenly carried off by a severe attack of pneumonia.

The trouble with an essay like this is that, viewed from the outside, Bethe is not a particularly interesting character, and the child Lillian could not possibly have penetrated to her core. The purpose of the memoir, however, has not much to do with Bethe, anyway; it is mostly meant to explain why Miss Hellman's longest and closest relationship was with Dashiell Hammett, whom she never actually married. The key passage reads: "Then I don't believe I ever thought of her again through a pleasant marriage that was not to last, until the first afternoon I slept with Dashiell Hammett. As I moved toward the bed I said, 'I'd like to tell you about my cousin, a woman called Bethe.' Hammett said, 'You can tell me if you have to, but I can't say I would have chosen this time.'" According to one's taste, one may consider this candid or unappetizing. The business of dismissing the marriage with the single epithet "pleasant" I find insensitive and unappealing. A marriage, even a brief one, cannot be honestly summed up with a solitary modifier more appropriate to a pony ride or ice cream cone. And if that marriage was indeed pleasant, why was it so brief? From our forthright, outspoken author, we have the right to expect something more.

The next essay, "Willy," begins as a portrait of overrefined but shallow Aunt Lily, whom Willy married for her money and soon came to detest. He had been an adventurer in Central America for years; now, through Lily, he became an important part of a

corporation like United Fruit, and, as a buccaneer and slave boss (even if only by proxy), rich and powerful. The adolescent Lillian and this middle-aged man became attracted to each other during a brief car trip to the bayou country; years later, after a fight with Dash, Miss Hellman is back in New Orleans, rediscovers Willy, and almost goes off with him on a romantic expedition to Central America. But, afraid of losing Dash, she changes her mind, and learns later that Willy, in dire financial straits, drove up to the bayou country and died there in a car accident.

I am not quite sure about the purpose of this memoir. Willy is not intrinsically compelling—his satanic deeds are executed by others, and at home he is merely an acrimonious, routinely unfaithful husband. The trip to the bayous shared by this older man and the awakening girl never takes on the poetic intensity and mythic reverberations that might lift it out of the commonplace, and the “plot” lacks dramatic, or even melodramatic, interest. Lily and Willy and their son Honey are a peculiar enough threesome, but that is not what is explored here.

Here, too, a basic lack in this memoir-writing becomes apparent. Miss Hellman does not possess the gift of seeing the odd, funny, telling detail that would make humdrum events achieve their uniqueness, their trivial but touching dignity. Consider Max Beerbohm in, “No. 2. The Pines,” on his way to see Swinburne. Now a visit to Swinburne may be momentous, but its preliminaries are quite mundane: apprehension and nervousness. Yet Beerbohm makes them memorable:

I had expected a greater distance to the sanctuary—a walk in which to compose my mind and prepare myself for initiation. I laid my hand irresolutely against the gate of the bleak trim front-garden, I withdrew my hand, I went away. Out here were all the aspects of common modern life. In there was Swinburne. A butcher-boy went by, whistling. He was not going to see Swinburne. He could afford to whistle.

It is that butcher-boy that makes this a great moment in memoir-writing; but in *Pentimento* there are few if any such butcher-boys.

Consider now Miss Hellman’s way of telling an episode, in which Uncle Willy takes her, a successful young playwright, for a drive:

Toward midday we went through the town of Hammond and Willy said, “In a few minutes.” The long driveway, lined with moss oak, ended at a galleried plantation house. “We’re home,” he said. It was a beautiful, half empty house of oval rooms and delicate colors. Beyond the great lawns were strawberry fields and, in the distance, ten or twelve horses moved slowly in a field.

I said, "I like my farm in Pleasantville. But there's nothing like the look of Southern land, or there's no way for me to get over thinking so. It's home for me still."

"I'll give you this place," he said. "I'd like you to have it."

Late in the afternoon, after a long walk in the strawberry acres, I said my aunts would be hurt if I didn't have dinner with them. We had an argument about that, and then we started back to New Orleans.

Now this is good, straightforward journalistic writing. But it is not absorbing, not a penetrating human document. Clearly the essence of what went on between Willy and the young Lily is, willingly or not, left unrecorded. This strikes me as a human or, at the very least, an artistic failure. Nothing really comes alive here: not the people, not the house, not even that unique "Southern land." The butcher-boy is missing.

One finally gets the uncomfortable feeling that this hazy portrait of Uncle Willy serves chiefly to show us Miss Hellman as a pioneer liberated woman, perhaps even a *femme fatale*: if, after all, she had not ditched Willy at the last moment to hotfoot it back to Hammett, Willy might not have died in that drunken car crash. Of course, one purpose that all but one of these essays serve is, sooner or later, to introduce Hammett as a character, to bring the events and characters into some sort of test-tube relationship with him from which he emerges with a uniqueness even more manifest than the Southern land's. So here is the crucial long-distance phone call, the turning point in the "Willy" story:

I phoned the Beverly Hills house from the restaurant. I said to Hammett, "I'm in New Orleans. I'm not coming back to Hollywood for a while and I didn't want you to worry."

"How are you?" he said.

"O.K. and you?"

"I'm O.K. I miss you."

"I miss you, too. Is there a lady in my bedroom?"

He laughed. "I don't think so, but they come and go. Except you. You just go."

"I had good reason," I said.

"Yes," he said, "you did."

This is the stichomythic, tough, ironic dialogue Hellman and Hammett usually exchange in the book and it is plainly meant to be mythic as well as stichomythic: they see themselves as Hemingway characters living out a fabulous Hemingway affair. But besides being sophomoric, these conversations recreated with total recall are also a bit suspect: surely Miss Hellman couldn't have written down

all these charged monosyllables in her diary, or remembered them, understatement by pregnant understatement. She becomes even more suspect, however, when she is putting casually profound statements into her own adolescent mouth. Thus when a policeman questions her about why she tried to see Bethe the day after her mafioso lover was killed, child Lillian replies: "I don't know. I read about Mr. Arneggio last night. Love, I think, but I'm not sure." From no young schoolgirl do I buy this "Love, I think, but I'm not sure," especially if it is set down by that same girl at the age of sixty-six or sixty-seven.

Yet this memoir-writing presents even graver problems. Though Miss Hellman is evidently a memory artist, she never gives us the look, the essential characteristics, the feel of a person in one of those rapid sketches that cleave to a reader's remembrance. There is not one character in *Pentimento* whom, however much I may get to know him or her in other ways, I can clearly visualize, despite the painterly title and promise of this memoir. For example, when the grown-up Lillian sees Willy again, we get what may be the longest physical description in the volume: "He was much older: the large body hung now with loose flesh, the hair was tumbled, the heavy face lined and colored sick." That "colored sick" is not bad; but compare this to a recollection by G. K. Chesterton of a school-boy whom he calls Simmons: "It was a hesitating face, which seemed to blink doubtfully in the daylight. He had even the look of one who has received a buffet that he cannot return. In all occupations he was the average boy; just sufficiently good at sports, just sufficiently bad at work to be universally satisfactory. But he was prominent in nothing, for prominence was to him a thing like bodily pain." From Miss Hellman's accounts I can reconstruct certain persons, and when Willy's son is described as "thin-boned, yellowish," I even have a dim, ectoplasmic view of him. But Simmons I can see inside and out.

The next essay, "Julia," is the most striking in the book. Julia was a beautiful, very rich Christian girl, Lillian's favorite schoolmate, who later went to Vienna to study medicine, became fascinated by Freud and, eventually, his patient. She had an affair with an American fellow medical student, from which a daughter was born. But the chap married another girl, a shallow ex-classmate of Julia's and Lillian's. An idealist, Julia was soon embroiled in Marxist political activities; when budding Nazis attacked the workingmen's quarter in which she lived, Julia was badly injured and laid up, temporarily unable to speak, in a Vienna hospital. Here Lillian visited her and sat by her bedside, clasping her hand in harrowing silence. Later, in 1937, Lillian receives word from Julia: would she consider the risky business of smuggling \$50,000 into Germany for the freeing of some political prisoners? Only if she wanted to, of course. Fear-

fully, Lillian complies and, after some Hitchcockian experiences, sees Julia again in Berlin. One of her legs has been amputated as a result of that Vienna incident, but Julia is hopeful—about coming to America again, about her little daughter named after Lillian, about foiling the Nazis. Later, Miss Hellman, who is never again to see her friend alive, learns that Julia was horribly killed by the Nazis, but that her body has been smuggled out into a London funeral parlor. There Miss Hellman picks up the mutilated body and takes it back to America for cremation. Julia's family will have nothing to do with Miss Hellman, their scapegrace daughter's corpse, or Julia's daughter if she could be located. They want Julia's money all to themselves, and nothing else.

It is a grim, exciting, and moving story, well told. But upon reflection, some things seem wrong with it. Miss Hellman, though she was receiving letters and presents from her, doesn't know much about Julia in Europe; as in a Greek tragedy, all the heroic, bloody, spectacular events take place offstage. But here there are no messengers even to report those awesome happenings. As a result, the centerpiece of the essay is Miss Hellman's smuggling of money into Germany, and this throws the whole thing out of whack: however great and tragic Julia may have been, the acts of bravery and devotion that we actually read about are Miss Hellman's.

And something else—a problem that runs through the whole book. It is all very well that the writing is mostly spare, clipped, understated. (Not always, by the way. We also get bits of bathos as when her childhood notebooks are described by the author as "filled with question marks: the large, funny, sad questions of the very young.") But the essential technique and tenor of most of this writing is melodrama, as it was with Miss Hellman's playwriting. Consider, for instance, the dropping of ominous hints: "My letter was returned, unopened and resealed, and it was to be another year before I knew why." (Why, incidentally, does an unopened letter have to be resealed?) Or, again: "He said he was forty-two, and I didn't know that night why he coughed so much after he said it, nor why he stared at me so hard when we reached my door." These are cliffhangers, the devices of melodrama: we are meant to be on tenterhooks until, many pages later, our thirst for the answer is quenched. So, too, we are told at the beginning of "Julia" that all the names have been changed because some of the people are still living or because Miss Hellman is "not sure that even now the Germans like their premature anti-Nazis." Since she gives only first names, anyhow, this seems captious, to say the least; but the real reason, surely, is not tact, which Julia's relatives don't deserve, nor the Germans, who tend nowadays to grovel before premature anti-Nazis, but the creation of an atmosphere of mystery and melodrama. Still,

"Julia" contains some of the book's best aperçus, e.g.: "Neither of us knew much more than the bare terms of each other's [sic] life, nothing of the daily stuff that is the real truth, the importance." Or a passage about not trusting people's memories of childhood, which, without being earth-shaking, is perfectly cogent.

The next essay is called "Theatre," and in it the author reluctantly tells a little about her experiences on Broadway and in Hollywood, while professing not to know why people would be curious about such things. She relates quite deftly, nevertheless, anecdotes about the great and near-great of stage and screen, but when it comes to assessing her own plays and their productions, the comments are chary if not niggardly. This could be modesty, but I somehow find it hard to believe in the modesty of a person who drops, ever so offhandedly, a remark like "I . . . didn't care as much about money as the people around me," a statement I know from unpleasant personal experience to be untrue. But about that—to use one of Miss Hellman's own devices—more later. I am likewise suspicious of a playwright who deplores the general incompetence of drama critics, only to make an exception of Walter Kerr. Checking one of Kerr's books, I find that Miss Hellman has "a clear head, a level eye, and a fierce respect for the unchanging color of the precisely used word." With so clear a head and so level an eye, one would naturally see Mr. Kerr in his true, unchanging colors.

In this section of the book Miss Hellman moves rapidly and adroitly from one subject to another, and her ability to leap from comments on her *Watch on the Rhine* to her friendship with Henry Sigerist and thence to her even better friendship with Edmund Wilson is impressive in its acrobatically associative way. She is even witty here, once or twice ("savories—that upperclass English habit of drowning the bad with the worse"), but humor, by and large, is not her strong suit, what there is of it coming mostly from the acts of, or quotations from, others.

The next essay, about Arthur W. A. Cowan, a highly eccentric millionaire lawyer, playboy, philanthropist, culture lover and vulgarian, makes for diverting reading. But here, again, although this difficult, likable and also exasperating person, a pathetic dilettante of gigantic proportions, is captured well enough, deeper insights into him are not forthcoming. Indeed, the most memorable passage in the essay has nothing to do with Cowan, but epitomizes Miss Hellman's feelings about the McCarthy era, during which she behaved with rare and exemplary courage, at great personal costs. Still, even if Miss Hellman does not go into this, it is hard to escape an impression of smugness when she tells about Hammett's being the only one around to recognize that a gun Cowan brandished threateningly was, in fact, a toy, and that it was deposited, in their summer house, "on top of the collected works of Yeats." Since this detail has nothing

to do with anything, I must assume that the reader is meant to be impressed by the culture of people who line their summer house with the collected works of Yeats. My uneasiness is compounded by the fact that there was not then, as there is not now, an edition of the "collected works" of Yeats, only of the collected poems—which makes me wonder just how much attention Miss Hellman ever devoted to that prestigious tome.

Next comes a very short story-essay, "Turtle," about a snapping turtle on the Pleasantville farm, a creature that clung to life so tenaciously that, even after Dash had shot it twice through the head and then, with an axe, severed its neck down to one last piece of skin, it managed to crawl away from its executioners and disappear into the garden before finally giving up the ghost. Whereupon Lillian is moved to speculate about the meaning of life, for which Dash taunts her with his Hemingwaysque ironies, and she insists on not eating this amphibian Rasputin but burying it instead. Final irony: some four-footed predator digs up and devours the turtle, leaving only a few bones over which Dash erects a mocking cenotaph. In his rapturous review of *Pentimento* for *Book World*, Richard Poirier calls this piece "a moral tale," though what the moral is he makes no clearer than does the piece itself. It may be that women are, after all, more sensitive than even the most brilliant of men, or that one should eat every turtle one bags.

The short final essay is called "Pentimento," and its point, I regret to say, eludes me. In it, we see Miss Hellman, now teaching literature at Harvard, making insomniac pilgrimages in the dead of snowy nights to the nursing home where she would have installed Hammett had he survived that long; and we see also Helen, her faithful black maid, enlisting the help of a passing undergraduate, Jimsie, to get her mistress back into bed. A friendship develops first between maid and student, then between student and mistress; subsequently, Jimsie undertakes to get Helen's corpse back to her native South Carolina. We also learn about Jimsie, who gives up dazzling work in chemistry at Harvard to do no less dazzling work in astrophysics at Oxford, which he also gives up to go back home to rural Oregon and become rich by carving wooden rosettes for a woman decorator. He now lives with a girl called Carrie, who cooks and scrubs, and of whom he declares that she's O.K. Miss Hellman does not find O.K. enough for her, but Jimsie considers it sufficient. Then, as Miss Hellman is treating the rich visiting woodcarver to a restaurant meal he finds he cannot, after all, pay for, they reminisce about Helen who gave him the coat he is still wearing. It emerges that the ex-chemist-astrophysicist, who merely tolerates Carrie, loved Helen. "'Too bad you never told her so. Too late now.' 'I told it to her,' he said, 'the night I looked up your word, pentimento.'" And so the essay and book end.

Even Richard Poirier, who talks about the book's "immense literary worth" and "moral value" and about its creating "in us perceptions about human character that have all but disappeared from contemporary writing," fails to interpret this sketch for us, except for muttering darkly about "a kind of emotional range-finding." Mark Schorer, however, in the *Times* Book Review, explains it as "a gentle eulogy to Hammett but more especially to Helen," in which case why all this stuff about Jimsie's curious career and the final apotheosis of Miss Hellman's word, pentimento? But perhaps I just cannot see the tree from all that woman's skirt painted over it.

"I remember best what things look like and forget what it has been like to be with them," Miss Hellman writes and is, I believe, profoundly mistaken. For it is not nearly so much the characters in this book—not even the two maiden aunts and several Negro servants who are treated with genuine affection—who come to visible, tangible life, but, rather, her own moral, intellectual and, above all, emotional responses to them. The book is, ultimately, a more or less clandestine autobiography, and it is the contours of Miss Hellman's persona that the pentimento reveals underneath the portraits of others. This, too, would be fine if something significant about the author were to become clear; but even such a proposition as "All my life I believed in the changes I could, and sometimes did, make in a nature I so often didn't like, but now it seems to me that time made alterations and mutations rather than true reforms," which is as philosophic as the author gets, is not demonstrated by the course of the book. Except for the facts that she is loyal, courageous, outspoken, hot-blooded, a heavy drinker and "not good with actors and directors," we do not find out much about Miss Hellman either. There is another definition of pentimento, I discovered from P. and L. Murray's *A Dictionary of Art and Artists*: "several attempts to fix a contour with precision in a drawing." Perhaps this best fits the case of this blurry self-portrait.

But the book provided me with my own pentimento. When working on her adaptation of Anouilh's *The Lark*, Miss Hellman commissioned a colleague of mine at M.I.T. to do a sample translation of representative speeches by the main characters; though she had a trot to work from, it did not provide Miss Hellman with the nuances of the voices of the various dramatis personae. She would pay a hundred dollars for some forty or fifty pages of polished translation. Even by 1955 standards, this was less than munificent. My friend offered me half if I would assist him. Dazzled not so much by the paltry sum as by the chance to meet someone who could initiate me into the arcana of the theatre, I agreed. The work, about which Miss Hellman said she was in no great hurry, was only three-quarters finished when she called it off impatiently, offering to pay us half. My friend was too disgusted to demur, but I called

up Miss Hellman to stand up for our rights, politely but firmly. She became unpleasant on the phone, denouncing our tardiness and the paucity of work—she had, of course, understood single-spaced pages, insisting that that was how actors' sides were always typed. When I pointed out that this was in no case to be the actors' text and was clearly a piece of literary typing, always double-spaced, she became hysterical and announced that if we wanted to sue her, she had the best lawyers in New York, etc., etc. We had, of course, never even thought of a suit in connection with so footling a sum, but the matter got ugly because my thesis director, a friend of Hellman's, threatened to have me thrown out of Harvard Graduate School. The matter was finally settled by Miss Hellman's paying us the full amount and our signing a statement that we would have no further claims against her or her forthcoming version of *The Lark*. My thesis director also compelled me to write a letter of apology, which he demanded to see before I sent it off. It contained a quotation from Chaucer, and passed muster.

The storm subsided, and the whole affair wouldn't be worth mentioning but for one thing. To this day, Miss Hellman thinks I am vengefully persecuting her, and I was told that she believes that my friend Charles Thomas Samuels' unfavorable *Times* review of her collected plays was written to my specifications, if not, indeed, dictated by me. But the fact is that I, like Charles Samuels, never thought much of Miss Hellman's plays. Well before the *Lark* incident, during a Harvard Law School Forum, Miss Hellman wondered out loud why the play of hers she liked best, *The Autumn Garden*, had failed; she could find no explanation. In the question period, I rose to ask her whether that Chekhovian pastiche did not simply seem passé in an era when Brecht, Sartre and Camus were producing their most innovative stage works. Miss Hellman threw up her arms and said she couldn't answer that question, whereupon the moderator, Marc Connelly, an insignificant playwright with a once inflated reputation, jumped to her defense: there was no such thing as something new in drama, he contemptuously informed me, only recasting of the old. I tried to answer, but wasn't allowed to.

All this came back to me as I read in *Pentimento* about "the mixture of commitment and non-commitment" Miss Hellman finds inside herself, stemming "from Bohemia as it bumped into Calvin." I recalled how, during the aforementioned telephone conversation, I had said to Miss Hellman that she was being unduly Calvinistic about something or other. "But I'm not a Calvinist," she remonstrated querulously and rather literal-mindedly, "I'm a Jew!" "I know, I know," I replied, trying hard not to sound either uninformed or anti-Semitic. And here, a couple of decades later, it is: Calvin, from Miss Hellman's own pen. However.

B. H. FUSSELL

On the Trail of the Lonesome Dramaturge¹

"I LEFT THE THEATER because the fun ran out and the raw-money stuff came in," Lillian Hellman said recently. Americans don't usually connect theater with fun. Movies are fun. Theater is boring. Theater is boring because it is Art, Art is Culture, and Culture is ersatz, foreign—a genteel European import trailing clouds of snobbery. We have never had a thriving theatrical tradition, even when it was fun for Lillian Hellman, and not because we can't protect Art from Commerce, but because in the American pastoral myth by which we live and choose our images, we have always opposed Art to Nature, and sided wholly with Nature. Our fictive forms still present heroic Adam, isolated, having fled the corrupt world of Culture, Civilization, and Art; and now again alone, as de Tocqueville wrote in *Democracy in America*, "standing in the presence of Nature and of God, with his passions, his doubts, his rare prosperities and inconceivable wretchedness." Richard Nixon battles his enemies of the Press alone, John Wayne slays the Sioux singlehandedly, and Stephen Rojack conquers the parapets of Manhattan all by himself.

Some form of myth of community and some kind of actual community, on the other hand, are essential to theater, which is necessarily a social form—"a public event holding limitless private possibilities," as Tom Stoppard once wrote. The ideal condition for both

¹ CATCH-22: A DRAMATIZATION, by *Joseph Heller*. Dell. \$2.45. IN THE CLAP SHACK, by *William Styron*. Random House. \$5.95. THE PLAYS OF J. P. DONLEAVY, by *J. P. Donleavy*. Dell. \$2.95. THE WONDERFUL ICE CREAM SUIT AND OTHER PLAYS, by *Ray Bradbury*. Bantam Books. 75¢. PRESENCES: SEVEN DRAMATIC PIECES, by *Peter Taylor*. Houghton-Mifflin. \$6.95; \$3.95. THE LOVE SUICIDE AT SCHOFIELD BARRACKS AND DEMOCRACY AND ESTHER, by *Romulus Linney*. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$6.95. A THEOLOGICAL POSITION, by *Robert Coover*. E. P. Dutton. \$6.50. A CHANGE OF HEARTS: PLAYS, FILMS, AND OTHER DRAMATIC WORKS 1951-1971, by *Kenneth Koch*. Random House. \$2.45. PLAYWRIGHTS FOR TOMORROW: A COLLECTION OF PLAYS, Volumes 8 and 9, edited by *Arthur H. Ballet*. University of Minnesota Press. \$8.95; \$2.95. THE STY OF THE BLIND PIG AND OTHER PLAYS, by *Phillip Hayes Dean*. Bobbs-Merrill. \$2.95. GUERRILLA THEATER: SCENARIOS FOR REVOLUTION, by *John Weisman*. Doubleday. \$3.50. THE LIVING THEATRE, by *Pierre Biner*. Horizon. \$7.50. ASTONISH ME: ADVENTURES IN CONTEMPORARY THEATER, by *John Lahr*. Viking. \$7.95; \$2.95. THE STRANGER IN SHAKESPEARE, by *Leslie A. Fiedler*. Stein and Day. \$7.95. THE EATING OF THE GODS: AN INTERPRETATION OF GREEK TRAGEDY, by *Jan Kott*. Random House. \$8.95. THEATRE OF WAR: COMMENTS ON 32 OCCASIONS, by *Eric Bentley*. Viking. \$12.50.

a reader and a movie-goer is privacy, but members of a theater audience have to interact with each other and with the performers to complete the happening. Perhaps theater cannot exist in a society as atomistic as ours, any more than it can exist in a society that denigrates conventions, whether artistic or social, as restraints upon individual freedom.

Rigid conventions are not as crucial to arts that can allow for sprawl. Movies and novels thrive by extension and have made their own the traditional forms of epic and romance, wherein the wide screen of *How the West Was Won* is equivalent to the 760 pages of *Gravity's Rainbow*. The artistic forms that have been the most natural to the hyperbole of the American imagination have been least conducive to the compression necessary to plays. Our novelists and poets, especially, do not move easily to play writing because plays function generically not through words but through words made flesh. Vsevolod Meyerhold, in fact, recommends to the novelist turning playwright that he begin with pantomimes: "Pantomime shuts the mouth of the rhetorician whose place is on the rostrum and not in the theatre."

A number of commercially successful novelists attempting their first plays have shown so little regard for Meyerhold's advice or for any of the generic demands of the dramatic medium that they have simply recycled their non-returnable fictions. Joseph Heller, an expert in media ecology, had offered *Catch 22* in so many packages that he has begun to speak of its events and characters as if they were part of our national heritage. Now, in *Catch 22: A Dramatization*, he even apologizes for disappointing his readers by omitting certain chapters in order to produce a "narrative line accelerating toward a climactic resolution"—a tactic that might have been useful for a novel notoriously weak in structure, but that cannot salvage this bag of burlesque skits. What next? A TV series, starring Woody Allen as Yossarian?

William Styron's *In the Clap Shack* is worse. The overwhelming fatigue engendered, I suspect, in the author as well as in the audience, by the formulaic characters, situations, conflicts (WW II Marines, VD ward of Navy Hospital, noncoms vs. brass) makes this play no more than a crapula of the night before. But most shameless of all is J. P. Donleavy, who, in *The Plays of J. P. Donleavy*, pours his old watered wine (from *The Ginger Man* to *The Saddest Summer of Samuel S*) into new plastic bottles with a collusive wink at his audience in the dedication: "TO ALL THOSE FUCKPIGS OF MULTIPLICITIES WHO HAVE ATTEMPTED TO MOLEST AND DENIGRATE THESE PLAYS . . . I HEREBY DEDICATE THESE CONTENTS WHICH STILL BRING ME AND MINE SO MUCH GOLD."

Another group of established novelists have assayed plays for less grubby reasons and with mixed results. Ray Bradbury began, he tells

us, as a writer of bad plays and returned to the theater twenty years later because of what he did not see on the American stage: "I could not then, I cannot now, accept a theater that is devoid of ideas and poetry." Goodbye to the fun of his titles, *The Wonderful Ice Cream Suit and Other Plays* written for The Pandemonium Theater Company in Los Angeles, when the Culture tube is in operation—squeeze ideas (Shaw) and extrude poetry (Shakespeare). In *The Veld* and *To the Chicago Abyss*, plays in which Bradbury intends a serious—i.e., portentous—statement, the ideas are sentimental and the poetry is, well, let the Old Man Remembering Mediocrities speak for himself: "I will ulcerate the people's/ half-dead desires with vinegar-gnat/ memory." Only in the prose stage directions do we hear the authentic Bradburian voice:

There are great elephant trumpetings, a final cry from many creatures now struck by electronic death, dying. . . . The sounds run down like a phonograph record. In a flush of red light, all the colors of the room dissolve like oil down the wall into the floor as blood might be let from a flask.

The difference between novel and play is precisely that between an imagined sound and a sound that *is* a phonograph record running down, between colors that dissolve *like* oil or blood and colors that *are* gelatin spots. When Bradbury forgets poetry and ideas, he creates the delightful title play which is about real relations among real people: a ghetto gang of Mexican-Americans who pool their money to buy a vanilla-white suit. Like Desdemona's handkerchief, the suit visibly incarnates for audience and performers the meaning its possessors give to it.

In *Presences: Seven Dramatic Pieces*, Peter Taylor explains that he has resorted to plays rather than fiction to present the experience of ghosts and fantasies because fiction requires too much artifice to present them convincingly, "whereas in a play, the ghost simply walks upon the stage. We do not question his presence." But there are as many kinds of stage ghosts as there are ways of being present. There is Hamlet's father and Mrs. Alving's husband and Maeterlinck's bluebird. Only one of Taylor's pieces, *Maisie*, deals with ghosts who are supernatural spirits rather than psychological projections; the other plays dramatize "conceits" about self-deceptions and illusions in the domestic conflicts of the upper-middle classes. The condensed form of the drama works against the delicacy of relationships that Taylor handles so well in his short stories. Ironically, then, the weakness of these dramatic playlets is that they show too much artifice, are too schematic and too neatly paradoxical, so that the effect is more often that of O. Henry than of Hamlet.

In *The Love Suicide at Schofield Barracks and Democracy and Esther*, a different problem faces Romulus Linney, who has worked

equally in novels and plays. In *Democracy and Esther* he has skillfully turned into drama two novels of Henry Adams, set in the 1870's in Washington D.C., in order to dramatize the persistent "conflicts of American idealism versus American pragmatism," so painfully evident in the 1970's. But his best achievement is to have put on the American stage that embraces Stanley Kowalski but not Isabel Archer, witty and cultivated people whose intelligent discourse both masks and reveals undercurrents of a Jamesian subtlety. *The Love Suicide at Schofield Barracks* is an equally intelligent play, but there is an emotional flaccidity and a diffusion of energy that we cannot ignore because the playwright has set himself an impossible task: to show by reverse chronology how a General became a Man. What might work in fiction cannot work here, for the crucial event of the General's suicide, which it is the play's task to explain through witnesses, takes place before the play begins, so that the General can exist for us only as an abstraction.

A radically different voice is that of Robert Coover, who has turned his comic, quirky imagination from fiction to a handful of short plays in *A Theological Position*. Parodic language is Coover's meat and potatoes. Words are where the action is and what the action is, so much so that the pieces seem better adapted for radio than for stage. Coover's problem as a potential playwright is how to translate his large talent for sound effects into equally potent gesture and visible action. He solves the problem of a main action by exploiting in each piece a burlesque re-enactment of some form of ritual sacrifice, moving from the myth of Movie Western in *The Kid* to Christian myth in the title play. In *A Theological Position*, a sort of Chaucerian fabliau, the main comedy depends upon the radical incongruity between what the Priest is doing (screwing the wife) and what he is saying (persuading the husband by Thomistic argument that the Immaculate Conception is impossible). As the Priest warms to his task, so do his words:

Yes, I like words . . . Oh yes, words, the good old words! Resilient!
Elastic! Velutinous! . . . Thermogenic There's one! Febrifacient!
Oh, it's good! Pungent! Concupiscible! Oh! Omphagous! Oh! I
should say! Paludal! Poo!

So far, dandy. But the play's—and the Priest's—climax depends upon the precise location of an answering voice—*Her CUNT speaks*. After which, so does the Man's—and the Priest's—Prick, in a travesty of the miraculous tongues of the Holy Ghost. What is so concrete for the aural and visual imagination, however, is more problematic for the literal concreteness of the stage.

Kenneth Koch, whose dramatic pieces of the last twenty years have been published in *A Change of Hearts: Plays, Films, and Other Dramatic Works*, also finds dramatic form in fable, myth, legend,

and in the stance of parody. To sing his urban pastorals he adopts the voice of a pretend naïf, and it is precisely the consistency of this voice that, while it imitates like a mockingbird and steals like a magpie, yet makes all tunes its own. He juggles bits of Noh plays, Christmas pantomimes, historical pageants, Happenings, allegorical operas—the most unlikely mediums—to convey the most improbable materials—political satire, the student revolt at Columbia, an explanation of the Gold Standard. Since these are occasional pieces, his best form I think is a modern version of the Jacobean masque. In *The Construction of Boston* or *The Tinguely Machine Mystery* or *The Moon Balloon*, all of which celebrate the Wedding of Progress and Art, a congeries of New York artists play to his Ben Jonson a corporate Inigo Jones, New York City his Gloriana, to whom he offers “A great urban-souled bouquet/ Of people and their actions!”

As for new playwrights, the editor of *Playwrights for Tomorrow: A Collection of Plays* (published by the Office for Advanced Drama Research [!] at the University of Minnesota) claims that the works selected for Volumes 8 and 9 from thousands of manuscripts “represent where the action seems to be at the moment.” If so, the action is in films. With the exception of Gladden Schrock’s one-act play *Madam Popov*, which nicely fills the dimensions of the stage by exploiting its finiteness and by playing on the paradoxes of stage illusion—“Flesh has overcome metaphor at last,” cries Madam at her death—the best of the other plays chafe against the restrictions of the stage. In William N. Monson’s *The Nihilist*, for example, the playwright relies heavily on projected film montage because his scope is epic; and although he attempts to stage events from the hero-villain’s point of view, the device of narrating stage-manager is clumsy. Were the play a movie, the camera could project easily an epic panorama through the focus of a single “eye.” In Joel Schwartz’s *Psalms of Two Davids*, the playwright attempts to encompass Biblical history in the mode of Greek tragedy, with major characters in close-up against a formalized Chorus. Although the intent of the play is undoubtedly closer to *Richard II* than to *The Robe*, one feels an unconsciously cinematic imagination leaking through: “The interior scene is transformed into an exterior scene as a full sunrise unfolds before David’s eyes.”

To turn finally to the plays of Phillip Hayes Dean in *The Sty of the Blind Pig and Other Plays* is to wallow in the luxury of a fully fledged playwright and a fully theatrical imagination. Eric Bentley has said that drama is not made up of characters but that “character is rendered by relationships, and relationships are defined in happenings.” Although in the short plays of Dean’s trilogy entitled *American Night Cry* the relationships tend to be—literally—too black and white, too simplistically opposed and reversed; still they are all

paradigms of power plays which, given full development in *The Sty of the Blind Pig*, are the stuff drama is made of, full of humor, compassion, irony, fear. Rather like Pinter, Dean stages realistic domestic scenes in order to undermine them with emotional charges that constantly threaten to explode. Unlike Pinter, Dean plants his explosives not in silences but in verbal barrages: insult is the common converse of his characters, flying their daily sport. Because they are rooted in a specific cultural idiom, these Black plays often recall the Irish plays of O'Casey or Synge in the vitality of language, in the depiction of loveable-outrageous characters engaged in the strategies of the down and out, in the reverberations of a supernatural experienced as a felt presence in daily lives. Thus a character like Blind Jordan in *The Sty* functions credibly both as an actual street singer and as a figure of Blind Fate, a catalyst for the irrational and inhuman demands human beings make of each other in a world they do not control.

Dean speaks with artistic authority partly because he speaks for and from a particular community. If in general America's lack of a public community and its ideal of individualism make the act of theater difficult, so America's puritanic pragmatism seems to oblige critics to justify the dramatic arts on utilitarian grounds. Art has value only as it leads directly to action—whether to a higher morality, to personal salvation, to political revolution, or even to sexual ecstasy (Norman Mailer: "In every thespian is an orgiast screaming to get out"). And thus the most academically conservative and the most politically radical of dramatic critics join hands in their nineteenth-century assumptions about the Missionary function of literature, that of bringing Truth to the Natives.

G. B. Shaw said straight out: "I write plays with the deliberate object of converting the nation to my opinion." John Weisman in his collection of dramatic graffiti entitled *Guerrilla Theater: Scenarios for Revolution* logically proceeds from Shaw's conception of plays as editorials to the notion that plays are How-To handbooks: "This book is a collection of scenarios for revolution. . . . Treat it like a play. Watch it and talk with it. Listen, participate. Do it." Ed Bereal of the Bodacious Buggerrilla Theater of Los Angeles, whom Weisman quotes, defines this aim more succinctly: "rip down fuckin' Main Street, man." But Bereal also acknowledges that one of the things that happens to disenfranchised people "is they get ripped off of their imagination." On the basis of Weisman's inclusions, the only theater group that appears to respond successfully to the imaginative challenge is El Teatro Campesino in Fresno, Calif., whose dramatized parables are imagined and presented in a form integral with the experiences of its audience of Cesar Chavez workers. Using the weapon of humor, and without the cant, self-pity, and self-righteousness that increases the imaginative rip-off of the other groups, El

Teatro's "actos" function with the immediacy of medieval Moralities. In *La Quinta Temporada*, Winter speaks: "I am Winter and I want money."

Winter's words provide a measure by which to gauge the fatuities of the most publicized and the eldest "guerrilla" group, whose history Pierre Biner has recorded as hagiography in *The Living Theatre* and whose credo he cites without irony: "They were fighting for money against money." Humbly seeking martyrdom, the Becks' theatrical quest has been one long yearn for a final consummation with the Utterly Real. From their early production of *The Connection* to "The Rite of the Mysterious Voyage" in *Paradise Now*, in which the actor goes into a trance ending in convulsions, they have justified their entire artistic venture by its approximation to anti-art: "What happens in this rite is entirely real." Now at last, according to recent report, their prayers to "Abandon the Theatres . . . Create Action" have been answered: they have achieved apotheosis by joining the Wobblies.

Although John Lahr in *Astonish Me: Adventures in Contemporary Theater* plays more sophisticated variations on the theme of the interchangeability of performances in life and art, he too judges dramatic events by the degree to which they produce psycho-spiritual therapy. What he likes he calls "spiritual"; what he doesn't, "bourgeois." Tina Turner caressing her mike as a phallus is a "religious figure" evoking "spiritual concern." Joe Orton as a farceur is sacred because he illustrates the social insanity of our time; Feydeau, on the other hand, is bourgeois because he "avoids high seriousness in his fun." How Arnoldian the Village Voice. A flea like Neil Simon is clubbed to death with quotes from Karl Jaspers; a wag like Orton is canonized according to the gospel of R. D. Laing. Lahr works his life-is-a-game metaphors so strenuously that he loses track of the counters: he praises the street-theater production of *Orlando Furioso* as a "contact sport" and condemns contact sports as "right-wing theater"—football equals fascistic racism, baseball equals capitalistic pastoral. For Lahr the function of theater is "to shock audiences from their life sleep." He is, however, better than his doctrine, and in responding sympathetically to new plays and events, as he does in "Mohammed Ali: The Last Goodbye," he shows what he can do when he rises above principle.

High-mindedness similarly afflicts the academic criticism of Travis Bogard in *Contour in Time: The Plays of Eugene O'Neill*. This critical biography wraps up the whole enchilada, covering all the familiar ground charted by O'Neill in his "consuming quest . . . to find God and to know man." But Bogard never questions O'Neill's romantic self-evaluations nor the popularistic accolades of the press and the Swedish academy. He sees O'Neill as O'Neill saw himself, a tragic hero brooding in solitary agony before the

mirroring stage. Bogard takes for granted "O'Neill's central position in the drama of the modern world," right up there with Chekhov, Shaw, Pirandello, and Brecht; and although he admits that they wrote "with more intricacy, wit and style than O'Neill," yet none wrote "with more deep-rooted involvement." Well, how else *could* you justify the man who wrote the line "Life is a fountain"? Unfortunately, Bogard like his subject is not oversensitive to language; in fact, his application of high critical sentiment to low dramatic dialect allows one to suspect he is parodying Sheridan's *The Critic* in a malicious send-up of O'Neill: Here is Bogard's description of Yank in *The Hairy Ape*:

Like other, more conventional tragic heroes, he is a fall in pride from his throne before the furnaces. He is even guilty of a form of hubris when he brags that he is himself the essential force of life: "I'm de ting in coal dat makes it boin; I'm steel and oil for de engines. . . . Steel, dat stands for de whole ting!"

Neither O'Neill nor his over-praisers can make a Jimmy Durante into an Oedipus Rex. By contrast, Eric Bentley in his latest critical volume (see below) tells us more about O'Neill in a single essay than Bogard in his entire book because Bentley sees that O'Neill's desire for prestige is an unfortunate configuration in the design of "the American success story" and sees that, for all his pretension to Culture, "O'Neill remained horrifyingly barbaric." Most importantly, Bentley exposes the fallacy of self-involvement by posing the rhetorical question, "Why cannot any literate person with an Oedipus complex write an *Oedipus Rex*?"

In the opposite corner from the hero-worshipping Bogard stands Leslie Fiedler, the Bobby Riggs of criticism, feistily challenging all comers—this time Shakespeare. Fiedler is always lively, always entertaining, always fully aware of his role of court jester to the courts of academe. His critical base, however, is stuffily old-fashioned, resting squarely on character analysis, the primacy of biography, the genetic, intentional, and even pathetic fallacies, and on the exorcist function of literature. So that in spite of the Freudian packaging, tied up with archetypes and mythologies, the contents disclose a pair of Victorian figurines—Edward Dowden holding Shakespeare's bust and A. H. Bradley embracing Hamlet and Lear. Shakespeare's "personal mythology," his "sexual queasiness," which would seem to be Fiedler's inventions, are actually chapters he has taken from the life of Frank Harris; so Shakespeare's possession by female demons—"his problem with women"—Fiedler has found in the pages of *True Confessions*: "Try as he would," Fiedler writes of Katherine (of all people!) in *Henry V* (of all plays!), "Shakespeare could not . . . keep his fear of women and his disgust with sex from breaking through." The Stranger—Woman, Jew, Moor, Indian—are all "ex-

plotted outsiders" whom Fiedler calls projections of Shakespeare's unconscious fears and desires in "the archetypal underworld of [his] drama." They are, of course, pure Americana, the projections of Fiedler's own sexual politics onto, first, American novelists in *Love and Death in the American Novel* and now Shakespeare, to make him too the creator of "a literature of horror for boys." The more American the better. Thus Fiedler rhapsodizes Caliban as "the first nonwhite rapist in white man's literature," "the first drunken Indian in Western literature," the creator of "the first American poem," and in an orgy of apostrophe calls him "*all America* in so far as that country remains Europe's bad nigger."

While Fiedler plays charades with his Characters, Jan Kott in *The Eating of the Gods: An Interpretation of Greek Tragedy* plays the role of Mr. Casaubon searching for the Key to all Mythologies. Not only Greek plays but the cultural fall-out of all the centuries are grist for Kott's mythological mill. His gods are "the structuralists," and as he undertakes his search for "the deep ritual structure" that underlies all ritual, all myth, strange transpositions result: "Lévi-Strauss's great cultural mythology" is to explain "the anthropology of Aeschylus' *Prometheus*," the song and dance of the Chorus in Euripides' *Bacchae* are to be explained by Negro spirituals and the dances of Uitoto cannibals. To illuminate Aeschylus and Sophocles, he quotes from "the sacred Iranian book *Bundahism*"; he intones the name of Marx, Heidegger, Pascal, Mao; he cites analogies from mathematical sets, the laws of probability, the genetic mutations of DNA. In short, he makes Dionysiac *sparagmos* and *omophagia* as modern and tasty as Crunchy Granola. For all his vogueish structuralist paraphernalia Kott merely follows the ritual view of Greek drama proposed long ago by the Cambridge school of literary anthropologists and, in the process, reduces to the absurd a method that is in itself a form of reductive criticism.

Both Fiedler and Kott demonstrate the dangers of a criticism that would force the past into the molds of the present—an act of intellectual tyranny performed in the name of cultural liberalism. The main virtue of Eric Bentley's criticism, of which his latest volume *Theatre of War: Comments on 32 Occasions* is perhaps his best, is his ability to see with clarity and honesty the "otherness" of the dramatic works he encounters. In his Preface he speaks on behalf of contradictions, on the right to be interestingly wrong, and because he is not captive to doctrine he can sense dramatic ambivalences, can feel words as emotional counters rather than constituents of ideological preachments. It is just this ability which makes him the best critic I know on Shaw, Pirandello, O'Neill, Brecht. He argues for the "emotionality" of Shaw's plays, he shows how Pirandello uses ideas as feelings rather than philosophy, he revises his own earlier readings of O'Neill on behalf of "the emotional dynamics" of his

plays, he demonstrates superbly the contradictions of Brecht's plays—those countermovements “for the sake of which the play was written.”

Above all, Bentley's imagination is consistently dramatic, whether analyzing plays and playwrights, political events, or the relation of theater to life, all of which comprise the Occasions of the title. Because he believes “that life aspires to the condition of drama” and because he apprehends the complexity of our daily encounters and performances and unconscious social contracts, Bentley can do justice both to the intensity of theater and to the human-ness of life—“Art is life even more than life is.” And because he perceives the difference in kind between acts of psychotherapy or of revolution and a theater of radical action, he can speak powerfully for “a theater of commitment”—a commitment against wishful daydreaming and toward a renewed concentration on “brute (i.e. human!) reality.” Perhaps the most radical action that theater can perform in America is to commit itself more courageously to its own weapons of the imagination and thereby to mitigate and even transform the terrors of that isolation in which, as W. C. Williams has said, “The pure products of America go crazy.”

HAYDEN CARRUTH

Smith

ANYONE WHO WISHES TO WRITE about the important contributors to jazz, especially in the early period, faces an immediate embarrassment: what to do with their names. In a good many cases the names pinned on them, or which they pinned on themselves, were originally chosen for reasons of press agency, a vulgar press agency at that, drawing on the sexual meanings implicit from the beginning in the word *jazz*. One thinks of Jelly Roll Morton, Trixie Smith, Hot Lips Page, Chippie Hill, and many others. There were more legitimate nicknames too, like Fats Waller, Red Allen, Bix Beiderbecke, and of course there was the fake nobility, King Oliver, Duke Ellington, Count Basie, as well as the hundreds, if not thousands, from Jimmy Blanton to Charlie Mingus, who have been known by their diminutives. And what shall we say of that truly splendid artist, Cootie Williams? It worked, of course—this press agency. To millions of

fans all around the world these very extraordinary people have been known by their ridiculous trade names, which have been a conspicuous part of the hokum generated about jazz for years. Almost from its beginning jazz has been deeply infiltrated by show business, a fact which those of us who have taken the art seriously have always deplored. Naturally we don't want academic manners either; but when, in the midst of the most serious consideration we have had so far of the work of Jelly Roll Morton, by a critic whose style is anything but frivolous, we find that great musician called, abruptly and blatantly, "Jelly," we can't help being taken aback. It's a small matter, granted. Yet forms and usages do have a certain secondary importance.

In the case of musicians who were men the embarrassment is easily enough surmounted. We refer to them by their surnames. But the musicians who were women present a greater difficulty. Bessie Smith, for instance. Or rather, not "for instance" but as a primary focus of attention, since she is both the reason for this review and one of the supreme artists in all American music. It happens that her name is not a diminutive, at least not legally; she was christened Bessie, not Elizabeth. Yet Bessie certainly sounds like a diminutive. Legalism aside, it is a diminutive. And it is what virtually all writers, from the pop journalists of *Variety* and *Down Beat* to the most serious critics, call her. For my part, however, I cannot separate this usage from a most sorry sort of condescension, a condescension not only toward art—would we call Mozart "Wolferl" (as his cousin did) or George Eliot "Georgie" (as I'm sure no one did)?—but also toward race and toward sex; and here, obviously, the problem of usage becomes more than a matter of form. Should we call her then, in the manner of some reviewers dealing with female poets, by both her names: Bessie Smith? That is awkward and soon becomes stilted in repetition. Should we call her Miss Smith, in the fashion of twenty years ago? Worse yet, quite out of the question. Should we call her simply Smith? This, I believe, is what my friends in the movement for women's liberation would prefer, which in itself might be a good enough reason for choosing it. In addition we have a precedent in the custom of referring to outstanding women of the past by their surnames alone, especially women in the public arts: Duse, Schumann-Heink, Duncan. Yet "Smith" sounds in my ear with an unfortunate clunk. There is condescension attached to it too, I think, and perhaps downright discourtesy—she herself would have thought so—if only because the name is so common. There are at least a dozen other Smiths who have been prominent in jazz alone: Pine Top, Stuff, Clara, Buster, Joe, Jabbo, Mamie, Willie the Lion, etc. Is there no way out? We can't rename her. (Legally her name was Mrs. Gee!) I only know that if I had found myself in the presence of that genius I . . . well, I would probably have stammered and

said nothing. But certainly I would never have called her Bessie; I can't imagine that. And if I wouldn't have done it then, I won't now.

I shall call her Smith, in the expectation that time will wear off the strangeness of it. And in fact the name in isolation, now as I look at it, already begins to seem more fitting. Here was this black woman in the midst of an alien culture, a dark-complected woman who preferred that darkness both for herself and for others—"I ain't no high yaller," she sang in one of her most famous blues—here she was, not only surviving but triumphing, and she did it by rejecting that alien culture and turning to her own people, or rather by staying with them and never leaving them. In them she found a culture rich enough for what she wanted to do. (She reminds us of how little a real artist needs for his sources.) True, she occasionally performed for white audiences, but not often and never in a spirit of parasitism; there was nothing in Smith's career to correspond with Ellington at the Cotton Club or Armstrong at the Paramount. Her own people in their poverty and minority were nevertheless rich enough and numerous enough to nourish her in full measure, both as an artist and as a person. Forty years before the slogans of black liberation were invented Smith was proud of her and her people's blackness; she said so consistently and publicly. Essentially she was a tent-show performer all her life, though she played often in urban theaters. She took the country blues, in the purity of its lamentation and bitterness, and transformed it into an urban art, retaining the power of its origins within its newly sophisticated meanings; and that new sophistication, as we should expect from studying the evolution of the other arts, consisted chiefly of irony; racial and sexual irony, or rather the two intertwined and felt together so singly that they cannot be separated. Smith was a terrifically sexual woman, to such an extent that her heterosexuality spilled over into bisexuality with a naturalness that seems inevitable and perfectly unobjectionable, so that in some ways she anticipated elements of the women's revolution as well as of the black revolution. In her extraordinary touring shows she surrounded herself with a troupe of young black women, and transported them in her private railway car back and forth across the country, reveling in that powerful female atmosphere. Her singing was impelled in every tone and timbre, as a moment's listening will tell, by the power and pathos of all mankind's undifferentiated lust. Yet the power and pathos were always shaped—and limited and controlled—by irony. Smith triumphed, in other words, because she was an artist and a genius, because in the singleness of her musical imagination she could reject the elements of her condition that were not useful to her—the very elements that drove politically oriented activists of the time into desperation and exile—while the rest, the useful parts of her experience, were perfectly absorbed and transmuted. And perhaps the com-

ponents of that irony which defined her art and life may be signalized after all in a very meaningful way under the rubric of the name that was put onto her, Smith, the commonest—one almost wishes to say the ugliest—name in the registry of her Anglo-Saxon oppressors.

This much is easy. Smith was an artist; she survived and triumphed as an artist. But beyond this we know very little about the precise factors that engendered her art; and unfortunately her newest biographer, Chris Albertson, does not help us to find them.¹ Albertson's life of Smith is merely that, an uncritical biography which deals with the artist as if she were no more than a popular entertainer. It skips quickly over her first twenty-five years, the period about which we should particularly like to know more, and then gives us a year-by-year march through the remainder of her life from about 1922, when she first became prominent, to 1937, when she died in consequence of a crack-up on the highway near Clarksdale, Mississippi. It is a somewhat dull chronicle of engagements, tours, recording sessions, associations with managers and booking agents, earnings and losses, newspaper reviews, etc., together with an account of her personal affairs. The latter is a tawdry enough account at times, tawdry and tragic. Smith was, as she said herself, a gin-head (though she preferred moonshine when she could get it), and she was also, as she did not say, an artist. We know the type; we have read scores of similar accounts: debauches, despairs, jealousies, fights, repentances, and so on. It is not an edifying record, but I suppose we have to have it. Albertson's excuse for his labors is that the record has been clouded heretofore, partly through neglect, partly through the ineptness of enthusiastic but unscholarly chroniclers; and this is true. Albertson's research has helped to set straight the record. He has, for instance, sought out and interviewed Smith's adopted son, Jack Gee, Jr., who had been lost to sight for many years. He has also turned up additional evidence concerning Smith's death, though not enough to put an end to the controversy, one way or the other, over whether or not she died as a result of being turned away from a white hospital in Clarksdale. But nowhere in Albertson's book do we find any account of Smith as a working artist. We know she worked hard, she sang as often as she could, she rehearsed, she had close associations with many other musicians, she gave careful consideration to the writing of her own songs, which were among the best she recorded; but we do not know *how* she worked. Albertson pays no attention to this at all, which is astonishing. It is inconceivable, for instance, that Smith did not talk about the work she was pursuing with such intensity; yet there is no record. We know, because it is perfectly evident in her recordings, that she lived *in* and *for* her art; the rest was necessary misery. Not only was her singing, which meant for her, as their playing does for all real jazz musicians, an

¹ BESSIE, by *Chris Albertson*. Stein and Day. \$7.95.

act of creation as well as of performance, her great joy, it was her repeated moment of being, the escape from history, society, biology—from all determinants—into the pure realm of creative existence. A biography which omits that life is hardly a biography at all.

Albertson's failure is the more surprising because we have enjoyed a considerable flowering of serious jazz criticism in the past decade, from such critics as André Hodeir, Martin Williams, and Gunther Schuller. As far as I know, Schuller's *Early Jazz*, published five years ago, is the best informed and most thorough work of jazz criticism thus far.² Schuller's credentials are impeccable; as a composer and teacher he has achieved distinction, and his devotion to jazz has been evident for years. (The radio program conducted by Schuller and Nat Hentoff nearly twenty years ago in New York was one of the best jazz programs I ever heard.) In musical terms his exegesis of what actually lies in the important recorded performances of early jazz is often astonishingly revealing. It is just what we who began to love jazz thirty-five years ago wanted but could never find. I began listening to Smith's records at about the time she died, and I have been listening to them with great regularity and concentration ever since, but I heard new things in them when I listened with Schuller's textual commentaries and notated examples in hand. This is explication, the New Criticism of jazz, at its best. Schuller ends his section on Smith with these words:

. . . Bessie Smith was one of the great tragic figures, not only of jazz, but of her period, and she more than any other expressed the hopes and sorrows of her generation of jazz musicians. If that were all, we would have reason enough to eulogize her. But Bessie Smith was a supreme artist, and as such [she] transcends the particulars of life that informed [her] art.

This was published five years ago, and it should have determined everything written about Smith thereafter.

Yet there is a limit to what purely musical criticism can tell us. Jazz, like the other arts, derives from three sources: the folk tradition, the individual personality, and the professional milieu. A study of interaction among these three sources should be the main purpose of any biographer who writes about an artist. In Smith's case the sources can be equated with the country blues tradition, which was already widespread in the south during her girlhood in Chattanooga and which has continued its own slow, almost underground evolution until the present day; with her own complex and tragic vision, as manifested in the timbre, tonality, and phrasing of her magnificent voice; and with the requirements of her role as a performer, in some part the requirements of her relationship to fellow serious musicians, like

² *EARLY JAZZ: ITS ROOTS AND MUSICAL DEVELOPMENT*, by Gunther Schuller. Oxford University Press. \$12.50. This is the first volume, extending to about 1930, of a projected critical history of all Afro-American music.

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Armstrong, Joe Smith, Charlie Green, and Fletcher Henderson, and in larger part the requirements of the entertainment industry in general. It is true that Smith was, by all accounts, a fine theatrical performer; she could dance and tell jokes as well as sing, and she is said to have taken complete charge of the theater when she was on stage. Perhaps we can say that her success during her lifetime was chiefly owing to this skill as an entertainer. But the success of her records in the years since then can be owing to nothing but her art. And there is simply no doubt that she was, and is, the best blues singer, and one of the two or three best jazz singers, of all time. Any comparison of her records with those of her contemporary rivals, Clara Smith or Mamie Smith (no relations) or even Ida Cox, or with those of country male blues singers then or since, shows her great superiority, not only in her natively magnificent voice, but also in her ability to bend and slur the notes of her song with exact intonation, to propel syntax against meter, and to shape and sustain a whole performance with musical and emotional consistency. Her influence, together with Armstrong's, is felt as a dominant factor in the evolution of jazz through the crucial period of the 1930's. If we take the common and simplified theory that jazz was an amalgam of earlier forms, especially ragtime, with blues feeling and the "blues scale," then Smith epitomizes the latter influence, though this is not to say that the blues wasn't an extremely widespread phenomenon rooted in the cultural antecedents of all black people. Of course we can never find the exact springs of any genius, neither Smith's nor another's. But there are questions we can ask. How did she respond to the folk tradition in her youth? What did she learn precisely from Rainey and other older singers? What did she learn from ragtime and early jazz? Beyond her rich and powerful voice, which is always dwelt on by the critics, what about her ear, in both the musician's and the poet's senses?—for certainly in her inflection of the vernacular and in her own writing she was remarkably responsive to her people's speech. Above all what artistic values did she hold in view, as distinct from theatrical values, during her progress toward her best work in the years from 1925 to 1929? These and similar questions, instead of her fights and scandals, are the topics to which Smith's future biographers must address themselves if they wish to do justice to her and to us.

GERALD WEALES

The Naked and the Dud

NORMAN MAILER IS SUCH A DEVIOUS WRITER that there is no way of getting a hold on him without getting burned in the process. At the end of the opening section of *Marilyn*,¹ having built his biographical castle in the air, he introduces a "reductive voice" to point out how tenuous the foundations are. As he, at his most royal and ponderous, puts it, "We draw back from such a projection." That "we" is plural, however, and Mailer knows it. The biographer disarms the doubting critic by inviting him into a corner of the Mailer mind and, if complicity will not still him, hangs an ugly motivational label on his suspicions. That reductive voice is one of "outraged bitterness," presumably because it destroys the mythic Marilyn that it wants to keep. Mailer, abruptly wise and tentative, cautions, "let us at least recognize that the reductive voice speaks with no more authority than the romantic." Sure. Why not? But let us also recognize that the romantic voice speaks with no more authority than the reductive, and that reductionism can come not from loss but from a distaste for psycho-flatulence. The only course is to bring burned fingers to typewriter keys and—following Mailer ("Magic is worked by the working")—let the act of criticizing create the criticism. (Mailer does get to one's prose.)

Let me begin as Mailer's defender. Not driven by Maurice Zolotow's understandable outrage (Mailer needles him almost every time he borrows from him), I find it ludicrous to call Mailer a plagiarist, as Zolotow has. After all, Mailer acknowledges his sources. Nor can I go along with the host of reviewers who want to dismiss *Marilyn* because it is based on secondary sources, primarily Zolotow's *Marilyn Monroe* and Fred Lawrence Guiles's *Norma Jean*. I may doubt Mailer's contention that "a great biography" might "some day" be built on Guiles's accumulation of fact, and I certainly would never let an adjective like "great" get near *Marilyn*. Still, it is a commonplace of publishing, and has been since long before Samuel Johnson wrote *The Lives of the Poets*, that popular biography is based on previously published material. It is hardly surprising, then, that Mailer, outgrowing the introduction he was commissioned to write for a picture book on Marilyn Monroe, should do what any respectable hack, asked to write a boys' life of Benjamin Franklin, would do: turn to material at hand and new shape it to his own needs. Sometimes (*v.* Samuel Johnson) the results are gratifying, and who would deny that Mailer is at least as talented as Lytton Strachey? If *Marilyn* is a bomb

¹ MARILYN, A Biography, by Norman Mailer. Grosset & Dunlap. \$19.95.

(and I think it is), it is because it is an unsuccessful book, not because there is something sinful about the genre.

In describing the "*species* of novel ready to play by the rules of biography" that he intends his book to be, Mailer promises only "a literary hypothesis of a *possible* Marilyn Monroe," and that is what he delivers. He wisely decides to junk the conventional views of the woman ("we have only seen her limned as an angelic and sensitive victim or a murderous emotional cripple") or, at least, to submerge them in a portrait in which the contradictions can live together. At one point, commenting on her personality as at once calculating and helpless, he insists "both are true, and always both, she is the whole and double soul of every human alive." This is a possible way of understanding Marilyn, but it is also a familiar Mailer device. In *Norman Mailer*, Richard Poirier mentions Mailer's "dualisms" among the "habitual mannerisms" with which "one gets impatient." Although in much of *Marilyn*, Mailer plays his dualistic game on the simple level suggested above (calculation vs. tenderness, killer vs. lover), he is after something more formidably metaphysical. Working with a theory that he developed in writing about astronauts, he says, he assumes that exceptional people have opposites within themselves, and that transcendence ("the enigma which faced every psychohistorian") brings the cream to the top, so to speak. He suggests that within the quiet, mousy orphanage girl there is the other self, the glamorous dream, the greatness imperative, that will emerge finally as the movie star, and that it is this pair, in conflict and in tandem, that are responsible for Monroe's artistic triumphs and for her final destruction. He frequently discusses this emergence as a search for identity (Poirier comments on Mailer's own "difficulty in locating a self") and, since she is an actress by trade, he has a ready-made self-role conflict, a standard of romantic drama (*v.* Dumas' *Kean*). Add that she is both a sex image and a woman with a sex life, and that she is a hard-working professional who often confuses her art with her publicity, and Marilyn Monroe comes through as less a person than an embodiment of familiar Mailer themes.

In a recent *Newsday* article, *Guardian* reporter W. J. Weatherby offers what may well be a factoid (Mailer's new coinage for a pseudo-fact invented for journalistic or publicity purposes). Weatherby says he once loaned Marilyn Monroe a copy of *The Deer Park* and that she returned it with the comment that Mailer was too impressed by "power" and that she knew because she had once been "scared of being a loser." So we have Weatherby letting Monroe describe Mailer in the terms in which Mailer describes Monroe, which seems fair enough. Certainly the idea of power, and the word itself, whether it has to do with one's control of self and situation, with sexual potency or with economic and political control, runs all through this book. "Deep inside her must have developed a blank eye for power unattached to

any notion of the moral," Mailer says, ruminating on the possible effect of Christian Science on the teen-age Norma Jean (he does an interesting bit with libido and Mind), and we can follow the tracks of power (in her and over her) through her marriages and her career to the final three-cornered struggle for her soul, a tag match involving Milton Greene, Arthur Miller, and Lee Strasberg. And beyond that into the *Maidstone* world in which conjectures about an affair with Robert Kennedy let Mailer, in spirit if not in specifics, join hands with Frank A. Capell, who wrote *The Strange Death of Marilyn Monroe* for one of the rightist presses, in a murder theory which grows out of and feeds that American passion for conspiracy that is familiar to anyone who ever picked up a throwaway copy of the Protocols of the Elders of Zion from a crossroads grocery counter.

A complex portrait, then, but beneath the convolutions of the Mailerian mind and style, there are the same old facts and factoids of Marilyn Monroe's life. In commenting on directorial distance in *The Misfits*, Mailer suggests that John Huston may simply have been "bored by the miseries of Miller and Monroe." Let me confess that I am. In the abstract, one more journey through the Monroe gossip seems about as attractive as another book about Scott and Zelda, another magazine article on the Kennedys, another publicity release from the Mailer redoubt (speaking of factoids, has it occurred to everybody that the Zolotow-Mailer charges and countercharges have less to do with real or imagined injuries than with their sharing so aggressive an agent as Scott Meredith?). If a new biography of Marilyn Monroe is going to carry me from abstract distrust to concrete pleasure, it has to put new literary or intellectual gloss on old goods. That is what Mailer intends, of course, but his ruminations make his description of Lee Strasberg sound like a self-portrait: "He had an unpleasant gift for presenting his sharpest perceptions in a welter of banalities." Even the occasional perception is part of a self-defeating process because the book is finally done to death by Mailer's addiction to nuance, subtlety, paradox. In *Cannibals and Christians*, Mailer explains how he learned that "personality was more fluid, more dramatic and startling, more inexact than I thought." The personality of his Marilyn is inexact and fluid, God knows, but it is never dramatic. He talks about the DiMaggio courtship in terms of farce, speaks of the "cruel comedy" of the Greene-Miller-Strasberg struggle, describes a Paula Strasberg party as "a Balkan *melodrame*," but these are critical comments not dramatic modes. Farce, melodrama, comedy, even tragedy—imposing any of these generic forms on Monroe's story would have falsified her probably, but it might have saved the biography. At this point in his career, however, Mailer is incapable of any direct and limiting form; he substitutes reflection for presentation. That may work when he is openly his own subject matter, as he usually is these days, and even if it does not, it is better, as he says in *The Prisoner*

of *Sex*, "to expire as a devil in the fire than an angel in the wings."

There are other problems in *Marilyn*. There is more wrong with his treatment of her life than its obliquity. He is dishonest in a variety of ways. He pretends to consider all the possibilities in Monroe's relationship with Joe Schenck, but he narrows the choices by first evoking "the obscene myth of the big producer" in an echo of the Teppis-Bobby blow-job scene from *The Deer Park*. I can see no reason why Mailer's concoctions ("a novelist has a right to invent the following dialogue") are any less factoids than Zolotow's anecdotes, and Mailer indulges in sentimental psychological clichés that would make Zolotow's "coffee table" psychoanalysis seem austere. A nauseating example: his assumption that "to the child, a catastrophic view of history must have begun" at six when a neighbor shot her dog Tippy. (That shooting incidentally shows Mailer at his most tiresomely Mailerish; although I am no friend of dog killers, old RV—reductive voice—has to suspect that the man shot the dog not because of "dog heat and dog body, dog funk leaving its odor on his new greens, rolling dog lusts on the garden crop," but simply because the dog was tearing up his garden.)

Beyond the incidents of Monroe's life, in the areas where the Mailer method might have been expected to work more successfully, the book also falls short. Mailer fails to tell us anything of interest about the legend or the actress. To describe the mythic Marilyn he falls back on phrases like "every man's love affair with America" (this one allows all the parentheses on Richard Nixon and John Kennedy), "the sweet angel of sex" and "the secret nude of America's dream life," which is a little like calling Mary Pickford "America's Sweetheart" or Babe Ruth "The Sultan of Swat." There are occasional interesting remarks on Monroe as performer, but for the most part he limits himself to generalizations which label her "a great comedian" or "so superb an actress," judgments which are a little hard to accept, particularly from a man who says, as Mailer does in *The Prisoner of Sex*, that he thinks *Maidstone* "superior to nearly every movie he saw." But, then, his description of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* as a pre-Camp classic makes me suspect that he never went to the movies in the 1930's.

It is impossible to take *Marilyn* seriously, or to take it lightly, which means to take it at all—not even for the pictures, which do provide a gallery of Monroes, from whore to waif, a Monroe for every taste. I prefer the photographs taken toward the end of her life, particularly those by George Barris, but that preference says more about me than it does about Marilyn Monroe. Which means it is not out of place in a review of a book by Norman Mailer.

RONALD DE FEO

Fiction Chronicle

DISPENSERS OF EXCESSIVE PRAISE presently plague the world of book reviewing. Compulsive enthusiasts, ready to cheer at the drop of a hat, have long darkened the world of film criticism. (At least once a week a particular New York film critic tags a new movie "One of the most memorable films I have ever seen.") But now similar clowns are practising book reviewing, tossing out superlatives at a frightening rate and unconsciously making a mockery of literary criticism. When a critic declares a novel "first-rate," "great," "a masterpiece," "remarkable," what sort of books are included in his own literary pantheon? What standards of excellence is he using? I'm reminded of people who find Vonnegut "great." When you ask them "Great in comparison to whom?", when you try to discover what other writers they've read and respected, they'll most likely come up with Brautigan, Hesse and Tolkien. I'm not suggesting that some book reviewers are as limited in their reading as these people, I'm simply wondering how many good books certain critics have consumed and even more important, how they reacted to those books.

When a critic in his review of *Gravity's Rainbow*¹ announces that if he is exiled to the moon and could take five books with him, Pynchon's novel would be one of them, we are certainly curious about those remaining big four. (If *Giles Goat-Boy* is among them, I, for one, will not sign a petition urging that this man be returned to the good earth.) If I am mistaken and if *Gravity's Rainbow* really is the masterpiece, the classic many reviewers have claimed it to be, then it is a fairly forgettable classic and one that I have little desire to re-read. *Gravity's Rainbow* is Pynchon's apocalyptic, World War II-postwar extravaganza in which normal, even near-normal, human beings are nowhere to be found. The world has gone positively mad. Technology has gotten as completely out of hand as politics. People are slaves to the machines and systems of their own design. Death is in the air both figuratively and literally (V-2 rockets scream through the sky). Plots and counter-plots are conceived. Paranoia is on the rise. Everyone is a victim. Everyone is a criminal. Lt. Tyrone Slothrop, whose erections anticipate the faster-than-sound V-2's and puzzle behaviorists because they (the erections) represent an instance of response preceding stimulus, flees London and those who wish to study or destroy him, and travels war-torn Europe. Along the not-always-so-merry way Pynchon introduces, develops, drops at will, a host of other characters, infinitely

¹ GRAVITY'S RAINBOW, by Thomas Pynchon. Viking. \$15.00. \$4.95 paperback.

crazier than Slothrop and even more ridiculously motivated, and constructs a number of incredibly labyrinthine plots and sub-plots bound to boggle the mind of even the most determined Pynchon admirer (*V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* seem like busy work next to this production). Throughout the long haul, Pynchon impresses us with how much he has read and even more amazingly, how much his brain has retained. It seems, in fact, to have become a cerebral junkyard, filled indiscriminately with both trash and precious items. For in the novel we find, among an infinite number of other things, allusions to Rilke, the Bhagavad-Gita, Orson Welles ("The Kenosha Kid"), references to King Kong, Charlie Parker and Anton Webern, brand names of various wartime items, names of radio shows of the period, songs, bandleaders. Pynchon touches on paranoia, history, death, demonstrates a wide knowledge of philosophy, physics, psychology. Folks, everything is in this novel but the kitchen sink—and that may be in there as well (at one disgusting point, a virtuoso fecal passage, Pynchon gets a lot of mileage out of a toilet bowl).

What does it all add up to? Pynchon is, to be sure, an extremely gifted man. His sheer ability to write, to imagine and capture places quite foreign to him both geographically and historically, his ceaseless energy and imagination, must impress anyone who has ever tried his hand at fiction. In *Gravity's Rainbow* we are treated to a feast, often an orgy, of language:

Over on the coast the Wrens work late, down inside cold and gutted shells, their blue torches are newborn stars in the tidal evening. Hullplates swing in the sky, like great iron leaves, on cables that creak in splinters of sound. At ease, on standby, the flames of the torches, softened, fill the round glass faces of the gauges with apricot light. In the pipefitters' sheds, iced, rattling when the gales are in the Straits, here's thousands of old used toothpaste tubes, heaped often to the ceilings, thousands of somber man-mornings made tolerable, transformed to mint fumes and bleak song that left white spots across the quicksilver mirrors from Harrow to Gravesend, thousands of children who pestled foam up out of soft mortars of mouths, who lost easily a thousand times as many words among the chalky bubbles—bed-going complaints, timid announcements of love, news of fat or translucent, fuzzy or gentle beings from the country under the counterpane—uncounted soapy-liquorice moments spat and flushed down to sewers and the slow-scrumming gray estuary

An embarrassment of riches? Perhaps. But the man can write. The real problem is not Pynchon's talent per se, but rather how that talent is applied. The sameness of tone throughout *Gravity's Rainbow* makes for tedium. By the time the reader is halfway through the book (as-

suming he gets this far), he feels that he has reached a point of diminishing returns. The always cool, hip voice of the constantly winking creator (Look, Ma, I'm writing, playing games, being clever) becomes less and less attractive. Pynchon's canvas, which at first seemed so vast, now appears limited, closed. The reader senses the somewhat sophomoric sensibility behind the book and seeks relief. There is none. Only more characters and events filtered through that same irritating sensibility. Scenes accumulate, there are often striking set-pieces of writing, but the book lacks tension and fails to build. Although Pynchon traces the progress of paranoia, shows men constructing the systems and machinery that will eventually destroy them, creates a nervous world of total confusion and sudden death, he has no particular point of view about any of these things. He demonstrates and records in minute detail, but he doesn't probe, penetrate or seek to illuminate. He merely markets chaos, produces one crazy incident after another to his and his fans' delight. Pynchon does not convince us that what he has to say is worth 760 dense pages. Ideas, a point of view, might have held the book together and given it the tension it so badly needs. Though much shorter in length, Beckett's *Malone Dies* is much more abstract, and it is held together not only by marvelous rhythmic language, but also by a guiding intelligence with a very firm point of view about the world it has created. With Pynchon, despite his talent and brain-power, all we get is annoying laughter in the dark.

As a satirist, Thomas McGuane works on a smaller scale than Pynchon.² Rather than attempting to create a universe, he is satisfied with capturing little sections of this country. He isn't as self-indulgent (though this isn't saying much), and he has more control of his material. Still, McGuane shares some of Pynchon's problems. *Ninety-Two in the Shade* is less frantic than McGuane's last novel, *The Bushwhacked Piano*, but it isn't nearly as funny. A fairly quiet (for McGuane), rather disjointed affair touching on various crazies down in Key West, the book doesn't quite possess the comic energy we usually associate with its author. McGuane is a notorious overwriter, and fortunately his overwriting is generally striking and amusing (like Nabokov's). But aside from the clever prose style, there isn't much in his work to hold the reader. Granted, his comic timing is sharp, and he has a knack for getting laughs with commercial references ("Peewee headed for Burdine's and bought the complete Arnold Palmer dress ensemble"), but these talents alone can't carry the somewhat rambling, abstract books he now apparently wishes to write. His work is all style, all surface. Consequently, his characters remain cartoon-like figures, his work seems to have little point, and the reader has only style to fall back on. The background then, the comic references, the descriptions of place and of minor characters, becomes more absorbing than the

² NINETY-TWO IN THE SHADE, by Thomas McGuane. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$6.95.

foreground. The reader finds himself turning McGuane's work outside in. The new book, which at first appears to be a tight, concentrated effort, is loosely structured and goes nowhere slow. McGuane tries to interest us in his vaguely depressed protagonist, Tom Skelton, who occasionally reflects upon violence and good old Charlie Starkweather, but Skelton lacks substance and coherence. Nichol Dance, Skelton's enemy and a latent crackpot, is a bit more lively, but just as, if not more, incomprehensible. He is "off-stage" too much of the time and then is conveniently brought back on for a hurried and very pat tragic ending. Perhaps my mind was straying at the time, but I failed fully to understand the true nature of the conflict between the two men. Then again, I should have learned from McGuane's other two novels not to question his characters' nutty behavior but rather to accept it blindly. All said, I wish McGuane well for he is a quite capable and resourceful writer, and when he is funny, he is genuinely funny. In his next book, I hope that content will at last be as impressive as style. I look forward to it.

I can't say the same for Ronald Sukenick's next. In fact, if it's another "experiment" in the same vein as *Out*, I'll go out of my way to avoid it.³ I really do hate being glib about someone else's work, but I don't see how I can be terribly serious and open-minded about a novel populated by a collection of near-invisible nincoompoops, one of whom at one memorable point unzips his fly to reveal a stick of dynamite (shades of *Fireworks*, a typically dopey Kenneth Anger underground film). It's a book filled with this sort of writing:

We better hurry she says.
 Shit.
 You depressed she asks.
 Shit.
 You are.
 You ask stupid questions. Ova huh. You could think of something better than that.
 It's hard after a while. Like with hurricanes.
 So you know what I'm thinking.
 Sometimes. You get so tuned in to everybody.
 A question of affinity. You've never come across it.
 I can't remember.

Who these people are and much, much more puzzling, why we should care about their totally moronic banter and movements is beyond me. But perhaps I shouldn't ask such naive questions for *Out* is an experiment and for some that supposedly guarantees it critical immunity. Well, "new fiction" fanatics, some experiments work and some don't.

³ *OUT*, by Ronald Sukenick. The Swallow Press. \$7.95.

And *Out* doesn't. Instead of extending the possibilities of fiction, it limits them badly. For me it is all too reminiscent, in method, of the work of my least favorite "serious" American writer, Rudolph Wurlitzer. His second novel, *Flats*, was the first book I reviewed professionally, and I found myself travelling buses and subways while suffering through it (using the rationale that if it refused to go somewhere than at least I might).

From writers who don't have enough to say, we come to one who generally has too much.⁴ We welcome a novelist of ideas, but when, as in the case of John Gardner, the novelist states and restates those ideas at his convenience instead of dramatizing them or at least attempting gracefully to integrate them (as Musil does, for example, in *The Man Without Qualities*) then we feel that we are being preached to and are tempted to dismiss the writer, however talented, as an unsubtle, pretentious bore. Predictably, most critics have turned Gardner's chief fault into a virtue; he is, they tell us, a "philosophical novelist" and leave it at that. I, for one, prefer a philosophical novelist who is less blatantly "philosophical" and one whose "philosophy" isn't comprised mainly of truisms. The Gardner books I've read thus far, *The Wreckage of Agathon*, *Grendel* and *The Sunlight Dialogues*, vary in size considerably, but they all seem bloated because of the author's passion for delivering messages (a passion that gets completely out of hand in *The Sunlight Dialogues*, in which rural types implausibly spout universals). *Jason and Medeia*, which is often written in what might be called mock poetry, is no exception: "I've learned that the primary law / of Time and Space is that nothing is merely what it is," "All serious options are moral / and all serious choices inherently risky," "Every tragedy is fragmentary / a cut of Time in the cosmic whole, . . ." Occasionally, there is a question (prose in this case): "How, that is, does an astral apogee come to know more about upright action than a vertical line or the loudest possible thump?" Lost in this idea display is the story of Jason and Medea, which once seemed to me rather clear, simple and tragic. Sometimes there are striking lines in Gardner's "poem," but for the most part the language is either feeble ("No fire was left / but the wild furnace of my heart," "now menstrual cramps/sharp as the banging of Herakles' club") or downright foolish ("I squealed like a rat incinerated."). Whatever one may think of Kazantzakis' sequel to *The Odyssey*, one can't deny that it has power, intensity and above all, a sense of life—elements noticeably absent from Gardner's self-consciously "modern" and "meaningful" volume.

Going from John Gardner's work to Heinrich Böll's is like stepping from an empty, slightly stuffy library into well-populated streets.⁵

⁴ JASON AND MEDEIA, by John Gardner. Alfred A. Knopf. \$7.95.

⁵ GROUP PORTRAIT WITH LADY, by Heinrich Böll. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$7.95.

Böll may be less modern and stylish than Gardner, and, for all I know, even less bookish; but he is more solidly rooted in this world and therefore more secure and persuasive when he creates character. In short, he knows people well and writes about them well. In *Group Portrait with Lady* he deals with dozens of characters, from nuns to businessmen, saints to sinners, who inhabited Germany before, during and after the Second World War and who are directly or indirectly linked to his elusive heroine, Leni Pfeiffer. Cast as an investigation or study of Leni by an unidentified "Author" (referred to throughout as "Au"), the novel records the voices of those questioned and in this way manages to create not only a portrait of a lady but also a detailed picture of a world. For while characters discuss Leni, they digress widely from the subject at hand, exploring their lives and roles, talking about friends and relatives, revealing their own preoccupations and obsessions. They are, for the most part, ordinary people who have lived through extraordinary times, and we see those times through their eyes, from constantly shifting perspectives. Occasionally, they concentrate so intensely on relatively petty subjects or activities that these things appear magnified and as such seem quite absurd. This occurs, for example, when various characters describe in minute detail Leni's work as a maker of elaborate funeral wreaths during the war—mad work stimulated by a mad time. Although the novel is witty, perceptive and humane, it does have problems. After a while the Author's bureaucratic-social scientific jargon, reminiscent of the officialese spoken by certain Ervin Committee witnesses ("input," "function," "operative"), becomes more bothersome than comic and satiric. The reader often feels that the investigative approach is only a gimmick and not a necessary narrative device. Personal histories are fine, but can they carry a book that is over 400 pages? (I sometimes found myself longing for scenes.) As Leni is developed she seems less intriguing than she did at the beginning of the novel; she also remains just as vague. Nevertheless, the book is well worth your attention. Böll is an intelligent artist and craftsman, and throughout the course of reading his novel we are most grateful for being in his company.

In the Middle of a Life,⁶ the second novel by the fine Canadian author, Richard B. Wright, is far less ambitious and adventurous than the Böll book, but I found it generally more satisfying and engrossing. Like Wright's previous novel, *The Weekend Man* (a very modest though excellent book, which, at least in the States, never received the attention it deserved), *In the Middle of a Life* focuses on a man whose life has not turned out as planned. We follow him through some trying days, learn what went wrong with his life and in some instances, why it went wrong, and are left finally with the impression that although he may attempt to remedy his situation, he will never

⁶ IN THE MIDDLE OF A LIFE, by Richard B. Wright. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$7.95.

quite succeed. Unemployed, divorced Freddy Landon, the protagonist of the new book, is older and more desperate than *The Weekend Man's* Wes Wakeham. His story sounds, in summary, more dreary and tired, similar to the well-meaning, but ponderous, low-keyed slice-of-life tales we've come across in innumerable novels, films and TV dramas. But Wright's intensity, his fine eye for detail, his equally fine ear for speech, and especially his gently mocking (though at times very biting) tone, give a certain freshness and immediacy to Landon's predicament. Landon is really a quite common man, with rather prosaic difficulties, but we never ask ourselves why we should be taken by him. Wright creates a most convincing protagonist, existing in a recognizable dog-eat-dog world. He has us share Landon's problems. If they are important enough to Landon, if they threaten him, then they grip us as well. When Fred goes to a small, greasy, second-rate real estate office on a job interview, we hope that he will do well. The position will be demeaning, but at this point Fred can't be choosy. We understand this sad fact of life, and like Fred we come to regard the miserable job as a precious one. Throughout the novel there are similarly involving scenes and a host of wonderful character sketches. I recall particularly the scenes in which Fred is holing up in his attic, trying frantically to produce a successful teleplay; in which he visits his movie-going mother and the theater owner she ran off with, seeing them in their California sport garb as "two giant children" play-acting in a make-believe world; and in which he accompanies a slick, sweaty real estate agent as the man tries to unload a house by an airport on to an elderly couple. The author writes effortlessly throughout, in a concise, often deceptively simple style. Several characters don't come off (Fred's mistress is too vague, and his rich in-laws are too typically decadent and foolish), but as a whole the book, its people, are alive and affecting. For all the successes in this world there are an infinite number of failures; Fred Landon touches and frightens us because the odds are that we will experience some of his misery.

That most of the new novels by long established and admired British writers are disappointing is somewhat of an understatement. We witness here either the exploration of ground explored before (usually with more assurance) or else a pathetic groping for new subject matter.

After twelve years, the determined Richard Hughes (of *A High Wind in Jamaica* fame) has finally completed the second volume in his projected series of novels, set in the years between the two World Wars and modestly titled, *The Human Predicament*. For his first volume, *The Fox in the Attic*,⁷ Mr. Hughes was lavishly praised, by intelligent people, in both England and America. He was called a genius, compared to Tolstoy and generally treated as a great modern novelist who had set out to produce the great English novel of the

⁷ THE FOX IN THE ATTIC, by Richard Hughes. Harper & Row. \$6.50.

decade. There are many things in the world I will never understand; this response is one of them. *The Fox in the Attic* traced the experiences of young Augustine, Mr. Hughes's upper-class hero, as well as those of his relatives, their acquaintances and servants, and also managed to touch on actual political events in England and Germany. The book maddeningly jumped from one scene, character, country to another, trying to appear big and vast; moved, despite the constant shifting, at a snail's pace; and was so mannered that the reader was nearly suffocated by style. *The Wooden Shepherdess*⁸ is the perfect sequel: it is as impossible as its predecessor. The book opens leisurely enough with Augustine swimming naked in Connecticut (he was mugged in St. Malo and fell into the hold of a ship bound for America!), then jumps to England to cover the activities of Augustine's MP brother-in-law, then later to Germany to follow Hitler and his rise to power, then over again to Augustine, who is back in England but soon to depart for Morocco, and so on. Hughes has the strange notion (unfortunately shared by a number of critics) that by recording one disconnected scene after another, thinly sketching a host of wooden characters and tossing in references to historical events (the Depression, the General Strike, the Night of the Long Knives) he is producing some statement about our century. What he is actually producing is one incredibly rambling and pointless novel. Elizabeth Janeway, in her *New York Times Book Review* piece, made an elaborate, creative case for the novel, but when I tried to follow her example and read between Hughes's lines, I found only space. Hughes has been an impressive stylist, but here style does him in for he composes scene after scene in the same lapidary manner, with the result that all scenes seem equally important, whether they be major or minor, and the novel grows hopelessly static. Some critics have decided to reserve judgment on Hughes's series until it is completed, but I fail to find any significant pattern emerging and also fail to understand how a volume three or four will alter the hodgepodge effect of the first two books. As an admirer of Hughes's early novels, I hate to see a potentially fine writer engaged in his twilight years in a project doomed to failure and encouraged by critics who should have recognized the fact twelve years ago.

I've never thought that Angus Wilson was as awful as some of the reviewers for this magazine have contended, but then again I've never felt that he was as wonderful as the late Edmund Wilson claimed.⁹ While he has been a most impressive short story writer, he has yet to write a completely satisfying novel. Either his plots creak badly (*Hemlock and After*, *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*) or drag on interminably (*The Old Men at the Zoo*) or else his central characters are not involving

⁸ THE WOODEN SHEPHERDESS, by Richard Hughes. Harper & Row. \$6.95.

⁹ AS IF BY MAGIC, by Angus Wilson. Viking. \$8.95.

enough to sustain full-length works (Meg Eliot of *The Middle-Age of Mrs. Eliot*, Sylvia Calvert of *Late Call* and pretty much the entire Matthews clan of *No Laughing Matter*). Still, each Wilson book contains several saving graces—crisp dialogue (Wilson is an accomplished mimic), a number of lively secondary characters, and some perceptive descriptive passages. I remember fondly, for example, the evil Mrs. Curry of *Hemlock and After*, the eccentric Rose Lorimer of *Anglo-Saxon Attitudes*, the nightmarish passages in *The Old Men at the Zoo* and the glimpse of New Town life in *Late Call*. With that truncated tribute out of the way, I must report, sadly, that Wilson's latest novel is absolutely dreadful and that it will only support his detractors' charges that he is an author who writes and writes but has next to nothing to communicate. The novel begins promisingly with a fine description of a fog-covered London (Wilson's homage perhaps to Dickens' *Bleak House* and Henry Green's *Party Going*) but goes downhill from there. Wilson tries to develop two central characters, Hamo Langmuir, a famous agronomist and a frustrated homosexual, and his goddaughter, Alexandra Grant, a crazy mixed-up rich kid (whose Bible is, of all things, *Women in Love*), but in the several hundred pages he too generously grants himself for this task, he fails miserably—both people remain thin, boring and totally unconvincing. The second part of the novel turns picaresque (God save us from this form) as Hamo and Alexandra go their separate ways in Asia and Africa, Hamo in search of the Fairest Youth of All, Alexandra in search of spiritual enlightenment. The Alexandra sections are labored, with pedestrian shots taken at gurus and hippie communes. The Hamo sections are just as bad. We have a long, silly mistaken-identity scene, some tired satirizing of colonialism, and many self-indulgent descriptions of Hamo in pursuit of perfect-thighed boys (imagine, if you can, a slightly light-hearted, Asian version of Visconti's absurd *Death in Venice*). Throughout the novel Wilson changes tone so often that we never know when to take him seriously, when to laugh with him or at him. Add to this a short-story-length epilogue in which the author desperately tries to tie his big, sloppy bundle together, and you have, as if by perverse magic, Wilson's worst novel thus far, one that will only embarrass the sensible Wilson devotee.

At this late date I suppose it is foolish to expect that the Kingsley Amis who produced books like *Lucky Jim* and *That Uncertain Feeling* will miraculously reappear, and it is perhaps unfair to Amis to measure the work he has done in recent years by that of an earlier period.¹⁰ But since his early books are clearly better than his later efforts, more subtle, amusing and convincing, we can't help but notice the decline of a first-rate comic writer and hope for better days. Amis' last novel, *Girl*, 20, was a gross, obvious satire on contemporary

¹⁰ THE RIVERSIDE VILLAS MURDER, by Kingsley Amis. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. \$6.95.

sexual mores as well as on some pretty standard modern types, but I still looked forward to his next. Well, here it is, a silly pastiche of old-fashioned mystery novels, and I again look to the future. Such is the nature of the Amis fan: he can't seem to say die. Except for the author's imitation James Bond novel, *Colonel Sun*, which is usually and understandably placed outside the Amis canon, *The Riverside Villas Murder* is his mildest and thinnest book to date. It is so slight, in fact, that it can't even stand beside his other "genre" novels, *The Anti-Death League* (a turn on the spy-thriller) and *The Green Man* (a turn on the ghost story), in which the author at least made some vigorous, though often awkward, attempts to transcend genre. Amis, however, can't quite bring himself here to create a straight mystery entertainment. He therefore focuses intermittently on the sexual trials and tribulations of Peter Furneaux, a handsome, rural fourteen-year-old, who longs for genuine sexual experience (as opposed to that of his own making and that acquired from fun sessions with his friend Reg) and who is really just a pint-sized version of other recent and not exactly charming Amis characters preoccupied with sex. Although Peter eventually gets caught up in the mystery story, his sexual adventures are really quite removed from it. They appear, in fact, to serve as mere padding. The reader often senses that he is reading two books simultaneously, one as trivial as the other. That the semi-serious, realistic story of Peter contrasts sharply with the playful, unrealistic, "literary" story of the murder only adds to the reader's frustration. The first few chapters, I should say, are pleasant and entertaining, as Amis sets the scene, quietly evoking his thirties rural milieu (though I could have done with fewer references to dance bands and numbers of the period), but when the author begins to develop an inept murder mystery, the charm of the book wears very thin very quickly. The utterly absurd resolution of the mystery makes us want to believe that Amis is simply parodying the whole genre, but there really isn't much evidence of this in the rest of the book. Although Amis takes a light-hearted approach to the mystery novel, it is also an unmistakably sincere, almost loving one. The approach doesn't surprise us considering the admiration he expressed for such writers as John Dickson Carr and Edmund Crispin in his essay collection, *What Ever Happened to Jane Austen?* Carr and Crispin happen to be fairly amusing whodunit authors who possess more style and humor than most. We can understand why Amis, the reader, enjoys them. What we can't understand, however, is why Amis, the writer, who is infinitely more gifted than these men, would waste his time, energy and talent trying to emulate them.

From a "serious" author trying to act the part of a mystery writer we pass to a science-fiction writer attempting to appear "serious."¹¹ J. G. Ballard is one of England's best and most imaginative science-

¹¹ CRASH, by J. G. Ballard. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. \$6.95.

fiction writers, and he has created some masterly tales and novels. He is also one of the few contemporary s-f authors I've come across whose work rises above comic-book fantasy and style. But for several years now he has been producing pretentious futuristic pieces and, because of their inventive, experimental appearance, winning acceptance in "serious" literary circles. His admirers can't seem to realize that although he is an accomplished technician and dreamer, he doesn't have any terribly new or significant observations concerning the future. His "serious" work is filled with stunning but pointless effects. *Crash*, which his American publisher foolishly compares to *A Clockwork Orange*, is all effect, a superficial nightmare vision of a car-and-sex-oriented society. The narrator and his acquaintances are adult car crash freaks who explore, with maniacal seriousness, the eroticism of destruction. When they are not creating havoc on the highways or smacking their lips over mutilations, then they are grasping for chrome and genitalia. What they would have done in, to and with our Edsel simply staggers the imagination. If the fantasies in *Crash* reflect Ballard's state of mind when he's behind the wheel, then his driver's license should be revoked immediately. The man is a potential menace.

At this point, I was growing rather depressed, and I sincerely hoped that Graham Greene, an old, sure hand, would come through.¹² Thankfully, he did, but not frequently enough for his new book to qualify as a success. Greene's protagonist, Dr. Eduardo Plarr, a physician in a small Argentine town, is a potentially intriguing character, but after Greene establishes a few of Plarr's general characteristics—intelligence, distance, weariness—he goes no further. We are left with a thin, predictable character (similar to Querry of *A Burnt-Out Case*) who fails to engage us sufficiently. In a way, we know Plarr too well. He is too clear-cut. He hasn't been given enough shading. We would like to learn more about the *inner* man, but all we are told (and it is a very convenient revelation) is that his father was similarly unfeeling. Rather than developing Plarr, fleshing him out, Greene merely re-emphasizes the traits we already know so well. Then, as if he were still uncertain about our ability to grasp the character, he states directly that Plarr is cold and incapable of experiencing love. We have, of course, gotten this point long ago.

Charles Fortnum, the title character, is presented in the same fashion, though he seems more superficial than Plarr. Unlike Malcolm Lowry's fascinating drunken consul, Fortnum merely appears to be an ordinary drunk, neither especially tragic nor pathetic, and we don't really care much about him. We aren't, it is true, supposed to care much about him (characters frequently remind each other of Charlie's honorary status and almost regard him as an honorary member of the

¹² THE HONORARY CONSUL, by Graham Greene. Simon & Schuster. \$7.95.

human race). But when he is kidnapped by Paraguayan revolutionaries, some concern on our part for his fate (and later for Plarr's) is necessary to carry us on. The book really gets bogged down in the kidnap business, with Plarr, Fortnum and their captors, an extremely philosophical group, deeply involved (while in the kidnap hut) in unlikely discussions of love, God and the Church. When Greene fails to keep in check his Catholicism and his passion for recording soul-searching dialogues, his fiction generally suffers (*The End of the Affair*, *A Burnt-Out Case*). Here we have awful lines like "Even if I cannot love, I see no reason to hate" (do people *ever* talk this way?) and variations on clichés ("Was it love which sent six million Jews to the gas ovens?"), delivered by that great old fictional standby, the disillusioned priest.

Too bad really, for in some ways *The Honorary Consul* is very attractive. Greene maintains throughout a serene, slightly cynical, world-weary voice (reminiscent of the type he used in his underrated autobiographical volume, *A Sort of Life*). That subdued voice perfectly conveys the world he wishes to establish, a world inhabited by burnt-out cases, men who have lost belief in their work, their acquaintances and worst of all, in themselves. He is at his best when he concentrates on these people, bringing them together, recording their bland conversations, describing their lonely apartments. Unlike many other writers, he is able to capture the weary and the dreary without boring us half to death. Greene still possesses his old magic, but unfortunately it can't bring to life the static, implausible second section of this novel.

Most of the critical response in both England and America to Iris Murdoch's latest novel led me to expect a quite intricate, difficult and profound work, a real Murdoch breakthrough in terms of subject matter and technique.¹³ But except for the first person narration, the frequent and not very remarkable or subtly introduced asides on art, love, consciousness, ego and assorted subjects, and some fashionable Nabokovian forwards and postscripts, I found *The Black Prince* a fairly standard Murdoch product, not all that different from the work she has been turning out for years—well-plotted (at times, simply contrived), "intellectual" entertainment. Typically, we have characters playing musical beds with no particular rhyme or reason (evidence that love, human nature are indeed unpredictable), travelling back and forth to each other's houses and flats at a frantic pace (though the traffic here, at least in the middle section, is slightly less heavy than in previous Murdoch books), posting letters to, ringing up and conversing with each other to report crises and to discuss their feelings freely and rather unwisely. Again, Murdoch's love of adjectives is in evidence ("a raw damp cold afternoon," "a warm intimate embarrassing smell") as is her occasional fondness for heavy-handed symbolism

¹³ THE BLACK PRINCE, by Iris Murdoch. Viking. \$7.95.

and a mild brand of surrealism (men on a docked ship shoot at soaring pigeons—Murdoch seems to have a “thing” for pigeons; note the pigeon-trapped-in-underground scene in *A Fairly Honorable Defeat*). The “Black Prince” refers, of course, to Hamlet. Throughout the book there are either allusions or direct references to the character and the play, most of which are really quite gratuitous and oh-so-clever. On the positive side, and there is one certainly, Miss Murdoch creates the aging and unsuccessful writer Bradley Pearson, an engaging enough narrator, who falls desperately in love with a pretentious, immature young thing, and whose fate genuinely concerns us. We may not always sympathize with the confused and often confusing Pearson, but Murdoch makes his situation moderately plausible and produces some nice scenes focusing on Bradley as the lovesick (literally) fool. The book is quite readable, with a number of fine comic moments, and I was amazed that I continued to follow the actions of a collection of totally uningratiating people (who, if transported to America, would probably end up on Manhattan’s plastic Upper East Side). The story, though not the lectures, held me all the way, and I recommend the book as a break from “heavier” reading. If you don’t expect too much and are willing to excuse the novel’s contrived quality, you’ll find it enjoyable.

I must confess, however, a weakness for those English writers like Murdoch, Wilson and (strictly early, pre-*Music of Time*) Powell who have a talent, if that’s the appropriate word, for making much ado about little. I admire their sophistication and literacy; and their people do chatter so well (a lost art over here). Everything is quaint and tasteful—even Miss Murdoch’s violent deaths. At one point in *The Black Prince* Bradley refers to a street lunatic as a “weirdie”; what a refreshing change from the vulgar American “weirdo.” Ah, those English, how frightfully civilized.

J. E. CHAMBERLIN

Alas for Caliban¹

Alas for Caliban. The Thousand Islands
Were full of noises,
Landscape and history echoing back and forth
Under immense skies, till his master
Cabined his spaces in a folio
And Euclids of the teepee, leaning-to
Birch-pole isosceles in a glade of hemlocks,
Drank deafening whisky in a written treaty.

—(from *A Sequence for Francis Parkman*, by Donald Davie)

IN THE SPRING OF 1877, a year after Little Big Horn, Sitting Bull came to Canada with 135 lodges, to join White Eagle, Four Horns, and other Sioux leaders who had been drifting across the border for the past eight months, anxious to find some freedom and protection. During the two centuries since they were driven from the headwaters of the Mississippi by their enemies the Ojibwa, who had obtained firearms from the French, the Sioux had prospered and been a powerful force on the western plains. All this, however, was changing. The Fort Laramie Treaty, signed by the Oglala chief Red Cloud in 1868, had ceded a great part of the Sioux territory in exchange for a reservation in South Dakota, "set apart for their absolute and undisturbed use and occupation." The Sioux were now to be under the control of the government; but it was a hopelessly unreliable control. Just six years later, the discovery of gold in the Black Hills, combined with the new white settlement made possible by the railroad, persuaded President Grant to have Custer give some crude form to the breaking of the treaty. Custer was stopped, but the process could not be. The Sioux nation appeared to be disintegrating. Crazy Horse, who had been with Sitting Bull in eastern Montana, was on the run, and was soon to surrender and be killed; Red Cloud had become an agency Indian, for a time scorned by and scorning those who refused to fall into line;

¹ THIS COUNTRY WAS OURS: A DOCUMENTARY HISTORY OF THE AMERICAN INDIAN, by *Virgil J. Vogel*. Harper & Row. \$12.95. GREAT DOCUMENTS IN AMERICAN INDIAN HISTORY, edited by *Wayne Moquin* with *Charles Van Doren*. Praeger. \$13.50. INDIAN ORATORY, compiled by *W. C. Vanderwerth*. University of Oklahoma Press. \$8.95. AND STILL THE WATERS RUN: THE BETRAYAL OF THE FIVE CIVILIZED TRIBES, by *Angie Debo*. Princeton University Press. \$2.95. LAME DEER, SEEKER OF VISIONS: THE LIFE OF A SIOUX MEDICINE MAN, by *John (Fire) Lame Deer* and *Richard Erdoes*. Simon and Schuster. \$2.95. OJIBWA SUMMER. Text by *James Houston*. Photographs by *B. A. King*. Barre Publishers. \$5.95. IN A SACRED MANNER WE LIVE: PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN, by *Edward S. Curtis*. Introduction and commentary by *Don D. Fowler*. Barre Publishers. \$15.00.

and Sitting Bull and his Sioux followers chose to look for peace in the land of the British, with whom their distant brothers, the Santee Sioux of Minnesota, had fought during the wars of Independence and of 1812, and some of whom had been given sanctuary (and later, in 1873, reservations) in Canada after the Great Sioux Uprising of 1862. Sitting Bull felt that "the Grandmother" (Queen Victoria) would treat with him in at least as favorable a manner.

He was met on his arrival by Major J. M. Walsh and four troopers of the North West Mounted Police, a force which had been established in 1873 in direct response to a massacre in the Cypress Hills (when a group of white hunters murdered a band of Assiniboines whom they, mistakenly, thought had stolen their horses), and to the disturbing spread of illegal whisky traders in the west. The sale (in 1869) of the northwestern plains by the Hudson's Bay Company to the Canadian government created a pressing need for a strong authority there, and the North West Mounted Police provided it; the whisky trade was ended, and Fort McLeod established where Fort Whoop-Up once had been. So far as the Indians were concerned, this action, and the treaties which were subsequently signed, were intended to give expression to a policy which had been the ideal since the time of Sir William Johnson and the formulation of British Indian policy, a policy elaborated at the turn of this century by the Canadian poet Duncan Campbell Scott, then Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs: "Protection from vices which were not his own, and instruction in peaceful occupations, foreign to his natural bent, were to be substituted for necessary generosity." (The latter, of course, had been needed to ensure military alliances.) Well-intentioned it certainly was, but it also bristled with the inevitable contradictions and contentions that have characterized Indian administration in both Canada and the United States since the white man first set foot on this land. And there is a further barb, often very awkward: Indian administration has, inevitably, never been able to disengage itself from the context of the administration and government of non-Indians within the framework of which it had to operate.

And so Sitting Bull met Major Walsh, and was sternly told to behave himself in a manner that befitted one living among British subjects. And Sitting Bull did so, not realizing that a far greater threat to his and every Indian nation was in store—a far greater threat, indeed, than that which was presented by a mere army or police force. He and his followers became, heaven help them all, a jurisdictional problem, to be solved by politicians.

While there was considerable sympathy in Canada for the predicament of the Sioux, and although Walsh himself befriended Sitting Bull, the Sioux were not wanted. For one thing, they were the traditional enemies of the Crees and Blackfeet, with whom the Canadian

government had recently effected treaties; for another, their numbers (about 4,000) and their skill as hunters (and, occasionally, horse thieves) presented a grave danger both to the already dwindling buffalo herds, and to the peace of the border lands. During the next four years Canada, Britain (who conducted Canada's international affairs at that time), and the United States bargained, in a not very friendly fashion, until the Americans were finally persuaded to receive the Sioux back, and Sitting Bull persuaded to go. At one point, the Canadian Minister of the Interior (David Mills) met in Washington with his American counterpart (Carl Schurz), and with President Hayes. Mills was scathing in his denunciation of American Indian policy; and to the American demand that the Sioux in Canada be disarmed, he responded that this would not only be humiliating, but would deprive them of a means of livelihood (since the Canadian government would not give them supplies for fear of setting a precedent, and encouraging other disenchanted American Indians to migrate to Canada. And the greatest of all dangers to the Indian emerges—the fear that governments have of “setting a precedent”). When Mills had finished, Schurz asked the crucial question: “How do you keep your whites in order?” A nice moment, perhaps—but little help to Sitting Bull.

For Sitting Bull was effectively starved out, beguiled (with the 185 of his followers who were left) back to Fort Buford in July 1881 with what he and the Canadian government understood as a promise of amnesty. Instead, he was imprisoned at Fort Randall for two years, prior to being stripped of his authority as a chief. By the end of the decade he was dead, murdered by Indian police in the service of Major James McLaughlin, Indian agent at Standing Rock, South Dakota, who came to arrest him at his cabin in Grand River for allegedly spreading the Ghost Dance religion of the Paiute “messiah” Wovoka among the Dakotas. The massacre at Wounded Knee Creek on Pine Ridge, two weeks later, of Indians who fled in fear from the incident at Grand River, rounds out the sorry story.

I have described this small and local episode because it provides something of a paradigm, and because it concludes with the rise and fall of one of those messianic religious movements which are a distressingly common phenomenon among indigenous peoples who have been confused by, and proceed to themselves confuse, the values and beliefs and conduct of the alien race with whom they are forced to coexist, and despite whom they desperately wish to survive. From the North Island of New Zealand to the West coast of Greenland, stories of such frenzied and often violent religious fervour are all too familiar. As recently as 1941, some Eskimos on the remote Belcher Islands, who had been subject to the impact of white civilization for only a short time, tried to interpret the Bible extracts distributed by the missions in the light of their old pagan beliefs, and some extracts

referring to the Second Coming of Christ created a pathological condition of agitated expectancy. When one of their number returned from the mainland with the message that he himself was God, and his companion the Christ whom they awaited, some of the natives accepted his pronouncement. In the hysteria that followed, several people were killed; and one woman, declaring that Christ was coming over the ice to the islands, persuaded a number of Eskimos to strip off their clothes and follow her seaward to meet Him. She survived, and was subsequently pronounced insane, though several members of her seraphic delegation perished. It is easy to see other, and cleverly literary, analogues to this, and reflect on the sardonic words of the seventeenth-century poet and dramatist Nathaniel Lee, who, when confined to a madhouse, remarked: "They said I was mad, and I said they were mad, and, damn them, they outvoted me." But Jack Wilson, or Wovoka, the Paiute messiah who provided the inspiration for the celebrated Ghost Dance religion, and who prophesied (using a mixture of Indian and New Testament sources) that the white man would be driven back and the Indians would recover their country—that "the earth would roll up like a carpet with all the white man's ugly things—underneath would be the wonderful old-new world as it had been before the white fat-takers came"—was not so easily outvoted. Nor were the obsessions which he cultivated nearly so tractable, *nor* so clearly indigenous, as it is common to insist. That it all came to a terrible conclusion at Wounded Knee is well enough known, but the causes of this, and less extreme or apparent, disorders are seldom related to the psychological and social disorders which afflicted and which afflict so many of the Indians of North America, and to the disorders which were endemic in the society to which they were suddenly exposed. For the story of the Indian in North America is to a very great extent a story of disorders and dislocations, and of the often bizarre responses of the Indians to intolerable stresses and severe cultural deprivation. However bizarre, such responses have their origin in hopes and longings common to all humanity.

There are various related factors, and they are implicit in the two recently published volumes of documents: *This Country Was Ours: A Documentary History of the American Indian*, by Virgil J. Vogel, and *Great Documents in American Indian History*, edited by Wayne Moquin with Charles Van Doren. Now, most serious books on North American Indians, whatever their particular focus, inevitably touch on these matters, and chronicle some of these disorders, though it has been disgraceful in the past that so many books on North America have failed to take the Indians into account as anything other than an annoying impediment, a slight stutter breaking the otherwise smooth flow of oratory and action as the continent was settled and developed. And so it is a welcome change to see a spate of new books now appearing which take the Indian point of view in all of this. But

it would also be welcome if this point of view was itself put in some perspective. It is not an academic point, for I recognize quite clearly the need to right the balance. But the dilemma of the Indian people is still with us, in as starkly ambivalent a form as ever, and it is in desperate need of honest analysis. Indeed, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that the ironic and terrible incompatibilities, rather than the romantically conceived inequities which flow from them, constitute both the past and the present heritage of the Indian people insofar as their heritage is a living thing, and a base upon which they can build their future. To ignore these incompatibilities and contradictions, and to wallow in facile regret or recrimination, is to do the Indians a grave disservice not so very unlike the disservices which have been done them in the past. It is to rob them of their heritage with the pen, instead of with the sword; and that, too, has been done often enough in the past, and often enough with the best of intentions.

These are harsh words, I realize, and will not be well received by many Indians and their friends, those who wish to preserve a particular and particularly endearing notion of the place of the Indian in the historical processes which have operated and which continue to operate on this continent. These two volumes of documents play, perhaps somewhat inevitably, to this crowd. Vogel's book is the more useful, for it is in fact written as a possible source book for courses of study in American Indian history, and most of us are easiest dealing with such matters, in the context which courses often create, to the sound of teeth relevantly gnashing. The collection by Moquin and Van Doren is, on the other hand, somewhat more eccentric, and to that extent more interesting. Of course, valuable material *is* brought together for the first time; a rich tradition and heritage *are* revealed; a fashionable commentary *is* there to assist us and enrich the primary sources; and cultural pluralism *is* celebrated, in both of these books, as well as in *Indian Oratory*, compiled by W. C. Vanderwerth. They are a blurb writer's dream. But justice is not done to the complexity of the Indian predicament, both in the past and at present—a complexity which is surely and shrewdly revealed in the comments of many of the Indians whose words are recorded here, but a complexity which seems to be hardly recognized by the authors and editors of these texts. The exception, news to no one familiar with writings on this subject, is Angie Debo's *And Still the Waters Run: The Betrayal of the Five Civilized Tribes*, republished this year. (It was first published in 1940.) This cruel story of the destruction of a wonderfully adapted civilization, and the theft of a way of life, in what Miss Debo calls an "orgy of exploitation" curiously and disconcertingly consistent with the needs and values which were the basis of Congressional and Oklahoma State policy in the early part of this century, and which provided a cover for the actions of greedy and ruthless men, is fully and clearly presented, in a book which is a model of honest and

judicious repudiation. But the story is, when all is said and done, still but a fragment of the total picture, for the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek and Seminole tribes were exceptional.

It is a pity that a more comprehensive picture does not emerge from the two documentary studies, since that is surely what might be expected of them. (The collection of Indian oratory is in a slightly different category, for its pretensions are much more modest, and it is consequently rather less disappointing, and indeed makes quite a useful book. The University of Oklahoma Press has, in fact, been publishing useful and often very valuable books on American Indians since 1932, in a series of which this is Volume 110.) Furthermore, in both of the documented histories, the perspective is somewhat contrary, as when much is made of the apparent superiority of the French attitude towards the Indians to that of the British. It was not so apparent to the Indians, nor does an honest look reveal this aspect. The French, of course, showed a great interest in the Indian, for a variety of reasons, mainly military, commercial and spiritual. Little plots of land were set apart for him, and seigniories were granted that he might be fostered and educated, and, above all, Christianized; but there was never any acknowledgement of any native right or title to the land. From the earliest times the policy of the British government was fundamentally different. One of the first recorded instructions to British colonial governors, issued by Charles II in 1670, declares that justice (British, naturally) is to be shown to the Indians, and directs that persons be employed to learn their language and that their property be protected. It was British policy to acknowledge, entirely specifically, Indian title to his vast (and, in many respects, idle) domain, and to treat for it as with a sovereign power. Dislike and distrust of the British crown may be part of the early American heritage; but these are supposed to be books about American Indians, possessors of a slightly different heritage from that which unconsciously informs much of the commentary to these documents. It is disturbing that there is so little recognition of the subtle and ironic complexities of this Indian history and heritage, for these books are quite obviously earnestly and sincerely conceived. Partly, this is explained by the absence of any adequate sense of the conflicting and paradoxical relationships which constitute this heritage, and obtain in its history; and partly, it is because, for maximum pleasure, one needs perfect quiet when one is tickling one's conscience. To say, as Sol Tax does in his foreword to Vogel's book, that "what may have seemed then to be a necessary evil is now a series of unmitigated unnecessary evils which arise in part from the continued avarice of a few, and in larger part from the psychological need to hide now the enormity of our earlier sin" is to indulge oneself.

Of what does this apparently intractable complexity consist, after all? While a full account is hardly possible, there are, at the very

least, some touchstones which might well be considered. The loss or disruption of their traditional means of subsistence and sustenance (for both the body and the soul), and the substitution of other, less congenial, alternatives for the native people resulted in severe social stresses, and often in starvation. The alienation of land, and the occasional and usually inadequate provision of other land to "replace" the vast tracts that had been lost, brought about cruel and unreasonable dislocation, and often all but completely subverted a heritage inseparable from the use and occupation of the land in which one's father was buried. The process was a harsh one, but was premised upon a principle, questioned by President Madison in 1817, but seldom since: "An *unqualified* right of a Civilized people to land used by people in the hunter-state, on the principle that the earth was intended for those who would make it most conducive to the sustenance and increase of the human race, might imply a right in a people cultivating it with the spade, to say to one using the plow, either adopt our mode, or let us substitute it ourselves." This was combined in those ancient times with another opinion, expressed by H. H. Brackenridge, that "before you can make an Indian a Christian you must teach him agriculture and reduce him to a civilized life." (It is, perhaps, some small comfort to see the word "reduce" in there.) The setting aside of reserves of inalienable land was one solution; but inalienable land isolates its residents from the advantages as well as the hazards of the society at large, and can be (as South Africa has demonstrated) very evilly turned. In an entrepreneurial and free enterprise society it also has the serious practical disadvantage that the inalienable land cannot be used to raise money; and this situation has in various cases forced the Indians to rely on charity, or on loan funds and native development corporations which are often grotesquely inflexible, and dependent for their existence upon changing political and extraneous economic considerations. It has proved impossible, for political reasons—reasons which have been staunchly advocated by most of those who like to call themselves liberal thinkers—to preserve for many of the Indian tribes the status of self-governing nations, despite Justice Marshall's earnest attempts in the 1830's to enshrine the concept in jurisprudence. (Administrative and decision-making—which is to say, political—structures do not admit of the same kind of diversity, though there are possibilities with both that might have worked to the advantage of the Indian people. Unfortunately, very little imagination has been exercised on this matter in the United States, largely owing to an obsession with the sanctity of the constitution. In Canada, it took no imagination at all to hang Louis Riel.) Serious differences in the response of various Indians to the changes which were being forced upon them created severe divisions in the Indian communities, and made possible a number of ruthless or, usually, at the very least, insensitive actions prejudicial to Indian interests. Tribal affiliations and organizations were dis-

couraged, and things fell apart; then they were encouraged, but turned out in many cases to be neither responsive nor responsible to Indian needs. And notions of law and order which were, and still are, antediluvian were put into effect in the least appropriate fashion in most areas of the country, creating a context in which the Indians were deprived of the protection of the law, and the whites had no basis of orderly and civilized conduct with which they could be persuaded by social pressure to conform.

The most honest, and therefore the best, account of some of these perplexing difficulties is given in *Lame Deer, Seeker of Visions: The Life of a Sioux Medicine Man*, by John (Fire) Lame Deer, skillfully and sensitively edited by Richard Erdoes. This is a delightful book, full of the humor and the contrariness, the rites and the wrongs, the rage and the frustration, which is the genuine heritage of the Indians of North America. It is a book about the present, rooted in the past, looking towards a flowering of Indian consciousness in the future. It has occasional lapses into sentimentality, affectation and easy condemnation, but so do we all, and the book itself has a rhythm to it that works to compel our general sympathy and assent. Differently affecting, though equally honest, is *Ojibwa Summer*, a book of photographs taken in central Ontario by B. A. King, with text by James Houston. Houston is an artist and author of some renown, and he was responsible for first developing the thriving industry in Eskimo arts and crafts which began in Cape Dorset in the early 1950's; B. A. King is a photographer of considerable imagination and skill, and has provided a fine insight into the life and the people of the three reserves which are the particular subject of the book. Its general subject is the Ojibwa (otherwise called Chippewa) people, and indeed all of the native people of North America; and its focus is on the kind of life which they are fashioning for themselves, and the values which they are maintaining. Both the photographs, and the text, lack some of the texture which their subject demands, and the book loses something by a certain deftness. It is, however, an appealing and a happy book.

Edward S. Curtis is certainly the most famous, and unquestionably the best, of the photographers of the late 19th and early 20th centuries who attempted to capture the invisible spirit as well as the visible features of a way of life which was rapidly changing, and in some cases disintegrating, in the west. He devoted over twenty-five years to the development of a photographic and ethnographic record of the Indian and Eskimo peoples of this land, and the results of this unique effort are embodied in the magnificent twenty-volume set *The North American Indian*, a venture which was generously funded by J. Pierpont Morgan (and enthusiastically supported by President Theodore Roosevelt), and originally limited to an edition of 500 sets, appearing between 1907 and 1930, and costing \$5,000 a set. (The set

has recently [1970] been reprinted by the Johnson Reprint Corporation.) It was a monumental undertaking: the twenty volumes were large, each nearly 300 pages in length, and accompanied by twenty folios containing over 2,200 photographs, each a distinct contribution to the art. The several thousand pages of text contain a rich variety of information of great value to anthropologists, historians, linguists and ethnomusicologists. Though a few of his photographs are reproduced (often without any acknowledgement) in many books on Indians, the major part of his work has been fairly inaccessible; and *In A Sacred Manner We Live*, a new selection (by Rachel J. Homer) of 120 of Curtis' photographs, with an introduction and commentary by Don D. Fowler, is most welcome. (And at \$15.00, the book is a wonderful bargain.)

Curtis' work was, in his own words, "the result of a personal study of a people who are rapidly losing the traces of the aboriginal character and who are destined ultimately to become assimilated. . . . It has been the aim to picture all features of the Indian life and environment—types of the young and old, with their habitations, industries, ceremonies, games and everyday customs." The photographs are awesome in their effect and their sensitivity, and they constitute a major ethnographic as well as artistic contribution to the history and understanding of the North American Indian. They are artistic achievements of the very first order, and a good and balanced selection has been finely reproduced in this book.

One of Curtis' chief interests, aside from the purely ethnographic, was in the complex relationships between Indian and white cultures and personalities that occurred in the development or settling of the west, and particularly in the Indian perspective on this. He toured the battlefield on the Little Big Horn with three Crow Indian scouts who had served with Custer (and provided us with a superlative photograph of them); he spoke at length with Red Cloud; and he was a great admirer of the Nez Percé Chief Joseph, from whom he attempted to learn all he could about the Nez Percé view of the Indian struggle against white encroachment and domination. Curtis' photograph of Chief Joseph is an absolute masterpiece, a clear and discerning presentation of In-mut-too-yah-lat-lat—Thunder traveling over the Mountains—whose pride and indomitable sense of purpose had, when Curtis fixed his portrait, barely but certainly survived one of the most poignant and memorable surrenders in the history of any land. On October 5, 1877, in the Bear Paw Mountains just thirty miles short of asylum in Canada, Chief Joseph spoke the following words to Colonel Miles and General Howard: "I want to have time to look for my children and see how many of them I can find. Maybe I shall find them among the dead. Hear me, my chiefs. I am tired; my heart is sick and sad. From where the sun now stands I will fight no more forever."

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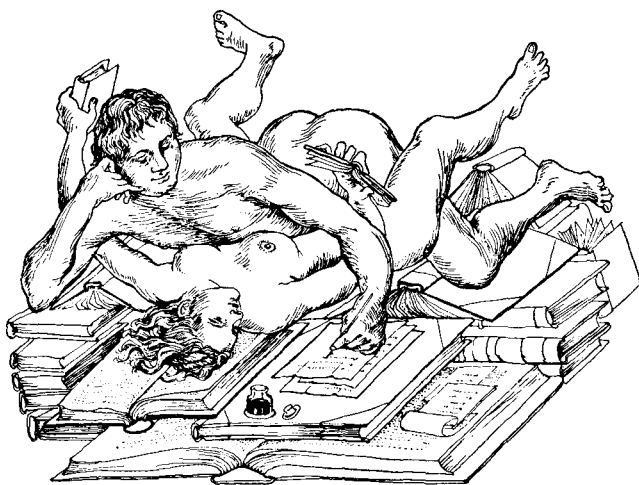
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